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The Works of

CHARLES PAUL DE KOCK

With a General Introduction by

JULES CLARETIE

THE DAMSEL OF THE THREE SKIRTS

Translated into English by

EDITH MARY NORRIS

THE FREDERICK J. QUINBY COMPANY

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CHAPTER I

Expounds the Danger of Sleeping Too Much and Tells How Dupont Amused Himself at the Ball

In the first place, my dear reader, you will no doubt consider the opening sentence of this chapter-head very paradoxical, so often have you heard the phrase repeated: "There is nothing so beneficial as sleep"; or, "Sleep is the best medicine"; or, "Sleep is the greatest restorative"; or, "Who sleeps, dines" (I apologize for citing this last axiom to you, for I am fully persuaded that you have never tested it). My only answer to this course of reasoning, were I inclined to argue the question, would be that the best things have their bad side; one should therefore be extremely careful never to abuse them.

But rather than enter into a lengthy argument, which might prove wearisome and so frustrate its object, I shall content myself with simply placing the figures before you, for you are well aware that there is nothing so convincing as figures, though it has often been argued that two and two do not always make four. First, then, I shall take the persons who go to bed at midnight; a great many

people, it is true, go to bed later than that, but as an infinite number retire earlier the balance is maintained. One goes to rest, then, at midnight, and one rises at eight o'clock in the morning; one has therefore slept during eight hours — the third of a day.

Consequently, should you live to be sixty, you will have given twenty years to slumber. Frankly now, do you not think that it is too much? Ah, I already hear you saying,—

"Why, monsieur, one doesn't sleep all night without awakening; I never have eight hours' sleep."

So be it; I am willing to admit it. Then, in place of twenty years' sleep I will credit you with fifteen; still, is not even that a good deal of time to lose?

"Sleep," says Montaigne, "stifles and suppresses the faculties of the mind."

You will say to me, "Rest is indispensable to man" (and to woman also; the ladies are so pleasing when they are asleep). That is correct; but in life, habit is everything; with four hours' sleep each day, or rather each night, you may be as healthy as Esculapius. I like to think that the god of medicine enjoyed good health, but I do not dare affirm it.

It would be well for you to acquire the habit of consecrating as little time as possible to this oblivion of existence; but, as you do exactly con-

trary, it happens that the more you sleep the more you feel the need of sleep, which stupefies you, stagnates your blood, deprives you of a portion of your activity, and sometimes renders your intellect sluggish (when you have any, be it understood, but my readers must necessarily have some).

Sleep has still another drawback, it is conducive to obesity; and you, reader, like the rest of the world, are no doubt extremely averse to growing fat. It is a burden without a benefit. In general, nothing ages one so fast as an aldermanic expansion of front. Were you to seek for a man who desires a rotund amplitude of waistcoat I believe your search would be fruitless. Instead, you would find many who seek to repress their too-exuberant figures, some of them even having recourse to that feminine instrument of torture, the corset, at the risk of impeding the functions of their breathing apparatus; others go so far as to deprive themselves of the food which their appetite craves for fear of seeing their proportions increase.

Alexander the Great, or the great Alexander — no, I think it is much better to say Alexander the Great, the latter being unique, while the others are very numerous. Alexander the Great was often unwilling, even when he was lying down, to allow himself to be overcome by slumber, fearing that it would cause him to forget the plans and projects on which he was meditating. You will say to me perhaps,—

"Why did he lie down, then, if he did not wish to sleep?"

He lay down to rest, but not to sleep. As a last resort he caused to be placed on the ground beside his bed a vast copper basin; he stretched his arm out over this basin and in his hand held a large copper ball; if slumber overcame him, his fingers detached their hold on the ball and it naturally fell into the basin with a noise that immediately woke him up.

You have a perfect right to employ the same means as Alexander the Great when you do not wish to go to sleep; but you would probably find it tiresome to hold your arm over a basin with a great copper ball in your hand; I confess that it is necessary to be Alexander the Great or Alexandre Dumas to do such a thing as that.

There are other means of keeping one's self awake. One rarely goes to sleep when one is amusing one's self; it is therefore only a question of amusing one's self, but that is not always as easy.

A gentleman whom I shall call Dupont, if you will allow me to do so, and who lived in that pretty little town of Brives-la-Gaillarde, had an unfortunate habit of sleeping too much. He was married, it is true, but it did not appear that matrimony was sufficiently enlivening to him; there are people who would be capable of telling you that it would only have the effect of increasing his infirmity.

It is quite certain that Madame Dupont herself often said to her husband,—

"You sleep too much, monsieur; it is out of all reason. You are only forty now, what will you do when you are fifty? You go to sleep as soon as you put your head on the pillow, you don't wake up all night, and in the morning one can't get you to open your eyes. You're not a man, you're merely a dormouse. When I married I didn't expect to have a dormouse for my husband. But it doesn't concern me; this oversleeping will be fatal to you; you're becoming very stout and soon you'll have a stomach like a Punch."

M. Dupont was greatly concerned at his wife's speech; he had perhaps been rather indifferent about his resemblance to a dormouse, but he did not wish to have a stomach like that of the hump-backed hero of that popular domestic drama known as "Punch and Judy."

It did not take him long to decide; he immediately sought his doctor and said to him,—

"Doctor, I sleep a great deal too much; my wife complains of it, and I myself feel that it stupefies me. What can I do in order to sleep less?"

The doctor, who was extremely fond of smoking, shook his head and made a little cigarette as he answered,—

"Do you smoke?"

"Yes, doctor, I do nothing else; why, I go to sleep sometimes with my pipe in my mouth."

"That's a pity, because I should have advised you to take to smoking."

"Can't you recommend something else?"

"Do you take snuff?"

"Yes, doctor, I even have a collection of snuff boxes, but I'm not very fond of it."

"That's vexatious, because I should have advised you to take snuff."

"Is there nothing else, then?"

"Do you play cards?"

"I know all the games, but I'm not overfond of any of them; cards send me to sleep immediately."

"So much the worse; I should have advised you to play cards. For in order not to sleep too much you must amuse yourself. Have you ever been to Paris?"

"Yes, doctor, twice; but it's a long time ago and I was there on business. That was before my marriage. It occurs to me that I found plenty to amuse me in Paris."

"Well, then, visit Paris again; stay there for a time, that'll enliven you, wake you up, amuse you! But above all, go there alone; don't take your wife!"

Dupont strongly approved this last condition; he hastened to make his preparations, imparted the doctor's orders to his wife and started, leaving his better half apparently resigned to his absence; but then no one cares much about the society of

a dormouse, or at least of one who is next door to it.

It was then 1860 and carnival time, though unfortunately the carnival was very short that year; we say unfortunately, for I confess we are not of the opinion of those people who cry,—

"Masking is no longer in fashion, people no longer disguise themselves to go in a carriage or on foot to the boulevards; fie for shame! all that has gone by, departed, is in bad taste. Before long there will be no carnival."

In the first place we cannot conceive why odium should be cast upon that which tends to amuse and please the people. It certainly does not provoke the merriment of you gentlemen — who look as though you were always in an ill-temper and who have a nervous attack whenever you see other people enjoying themselves — and I am very sorry for you because of it; but when in former times, during Shrovetide, a triple row of carriages filled with maskers formed an immense Longchamps in the interior of Paris, I can assure you that the pedestrians, the passers, the idlers, did not grumble at having this free spectacle.

Not everybody has the means to go to the ball at the opera house, nor even to the Salle Barthelémy; and the man of modest income, walking out with his wife during Shrovetide, returned home delighted when he had been elbowed and jostled by some harlequins or punchinellos; and if a bear

had said to his wife, "I know you!" she would proudly say to her porter, as they went in,—

"There was a bear who said to me,—'I know you.'"

You see well, my pessimistic gentlemen, who are averse to the carnival, that in suppressing it you would cause disappointment to a good many people! I know that would make no difference to you; but the task is a difficult one, for as long as the world stands there will be masqueraders. There are some people who will tell you they are to be found all the year round, and that one need not wait for a carnival to see them. But as that has been very often repeated, I need not say any more to you about it.

The carnival is the time for intrigues and folly. We might tell you there were intrigues all the year round, but that has also been said, and we will not repeat it. We will take the liberty of pointing out to you, in passing, that we never say anything but what is new; this is very complaisant on our part, and we are persuaded that you will give us full credit for it.

M. Dupont was, as we have already told our readers, a man of forty years of age; a time of life when one's tastes and preferences are fully developed, and when one may reasonably indulge them; but up to this time that gentleman had not given the slightest indication that he possessed any marked preferences whatsoever. He smoked, he

took snuff, he played cards, he drank, but had no real taste for any of these things, and they afforded him little if any pleasure. As to women, you have seen that the presence of his wife did not deter him from sleeping the greater part of the time. Dupont, nevertheless, was not insensible to the charm of feminine beauty; that which attracted him, however, was height, form, and carriage; in fact, he preferred a fine figure to a pretty face, and unluckily for Madame Dupont, she was pretty rather than well made; perhaps this may account for her husband's abnormal sleepiness.

Dupont himself was neither handsome nor plain, neither large nor small, neither stupid nor clever; he was one of those people who provoke neither praise nor criticism. However, he was well built and possessed a pretty foot and small white hands. He was very vain of these advantages, believing himself an Apollo in diminuendo, and had a very decided objection to the increase of his girth. It was principally the fear of this that had decided him to go to Paris; and since his medical adviser had ordered him to leave his wife at home, it was very evident that the doctor wished him to lead a bachelor life during his stay in that city; but what is a bachelor life, if it be not to participate in intrigues, little flirtations, and even affairs of a more serious character; in short, to dance attendance on all the women, society ladies when opportunity allows it, and grisettes when one can do no better?

As to grisettes, there are some writers who would try to make one believe that there are none of them nowadays, that they have gone out of fashion, like pug dogs — that the mould is broken. With all due deference for these gentlemen, the grisette exists, and always will exist, in Paris. And what else, if you please, are the artificial flower-makers, the embroideresses, the burnishers, the decorators, the laundrywomen, the vest-makers, the shirt-makers, the trouser-makers, etc.? They are neither great coquettes, nor those very free and easy beauties who display themselves in the stage boxes of the little theatres, and who are called, I know not why, "lorettes"; neither are they demi-monde, for very often their lovers have nothing to offer them except love; finally, they are not the daughters of good bourgeoisie, who go out only on their father's or their brother's arms; they are grisettes — the real grisettes. Don't let us try to change it; it is such pretty money, why should anyone wish it to be no longer in currency?

You, gentlemen, who declare that there are none to be found in Paris, go once or twice during the summer to the Closerie des Lilas, that ball favored of students who are still fond of dancing and sweethearting; you will there see grisettes of all kinds, you will see them skipping, laughing and fooling, dancing a can-can as gracefully as possible, and displaying their ankles far less than is done in the Spanish dances which are allowed in the the-

atres ; you will hear them talking and chaffing one another, envying this one's lover, ridiculing that one's, and in the midst of their chatter and the peals of laughter which fly back and forth around you you will catch smart, witty sentences and original expressions which you hear nowhere else, and at which you are constrained to laugh, at least unless you are of that school which is opposed to laughing and which dares to affirm that all laughter is merely a grimace. Good Lord! What a sorry school! take my advice, and don't send your children to it; you must see that the result of doing so would not be happy.

Dupont, arriving in Paris, then, during the carnival time, began his bachelor life by going to the ball at l'Opera. He had said to himself,—

" The doctor ordered me to amuse myself, and it is impossible that I should avoid doing so in the midst of a crowd which is mostly composed of pretty women who are not positively of the Lucretian type, who desire nothing better than to make acquaintances, and who, indeed, go to the ball with that end only in view. I shall take my pick, I shall try to find a little woman cast in the mould of Venus — nay, even in that of a Bacchante, for all the Bacchantes as I have seen them represented were well-built. I shall be as pleasant and gallant as I possibly can ; I have a little wit when I care to use it; in truth, my wit has grown somewhat rusty, but, what with perseverance and punch,

I have no doubt I shall do very well, and at all events I shall not go to bed at ten o'clock, because I shan't go to the ball till midnight."

Dupont had put his plan into execution ; he had had some trouble after ten o'clock had struck in preventing himself from falling asleep on his chair. Several times, instead of donning his black coat, he had been on the point of snuggling into bed, — but just at the moment when he was about to yield to the force of habit he had fortunately caught sight of his waistcoat and had perceived that it was impossible for him to fasten the lowest button of it; he was on his feet immediately, in haste to accomplish his toilet for the ball.

" You idiot ! " he said, apostrophizing himself, " do you want to have the figure of a Punch ! I haven't a hump behind, it is true, but to have one in front is quite as ridiculous and a great deal more inconvenient. Let's go to this ball, let's frolic a bit, and amuse myself. The deuce ! it's no joking matter, it's a question of keeping young."

Behold our man at the ball, then, gliding through the mob which thronged about the dancers, because there they could see the women nearer and could even ogle them, speak to them, or offer an arm to one who was without an escort ; all of which is permissible at a masked ball. And what is not there permissible ?

Dupont saw some lightermen, sailors, jockeys, and postilions, with charmingly pretty faces, for

the ladies who assume masculine costume do not wear masks and are not at all averse to showing their faces. They wear their costumes with an abandon which displays somewhat too much of their neck and shoulders, for these ladies do not understand that something should be left to the imagination of the beholder and that people are more likely to fall in love with that which is concealed from them.

Dupont chose a very graceful little blonde in the costume of a columbine, and to break the ice he invited her to a polka; but our Brives-la-Gaillarde gallant did not quite comprehend the extent of his undertaking; he imagined that they danced at l'Opera ball as they did in his province; he was, above all, unaware that the polka terminated in a galop — and what a galop! it is necessary to see it in order to judge of it.

It is a vortex, a species of raging madness which seems to take possession of all the dancers at the sound of that brilliant, lively, animated music, which rouses them, electrifies them; they cease to galop, they fly, they whirl madly, they dart, they push and drive and upset one another. One must be fearless, one must keep one's head, if one doesn't want to be upset.

This was what happened to Dupont; he had not the strength to resist the impetus of this bacchanalian flight; he fell, and in falling he brought down his partner also, who said to him, ill-humoredly,—

"My good fellow, if you don't know how to galop you had no business to invite a lady to dance with you."

And the columbine immediately seized a harlequin by the arm and started off in the galop with him, while poor Dupont, who could not pick himself up so quickly, was struck by the feet of several galopers and rose covered with bruises.

Our man, who was a good deal hurt about the knees, the shoulders, and the back, left the ball and limped home to his hotel, where he put himself to bed, muttering as he did so,—

"That's quite enough amusement for to-night."

But Dupont would not allow that he was beaten, though he had been so in a most literal sense, and some nights thereafter he again repaired to the ball; this time he went to the Casino, for he had been told that there he would meet women of a higher class. In fact, our provincial was delighted by the elegance and beautiful dresses of these ladies, who were rather in society than in masquerading dress.

"It is hardly likely that they dance the galop here in so dangerous a fashion as at l'Opera ball," he said to himself. "As to that, for prudence sake, I shall not galop; I shall content myself with inviting a lady to dance a quadrille with me— that will be wiser. I am acquainted with the figures of a quadrille, which do not change, and it's impossible for me to get thrown down while dancing the ladies' chain or the pastourelle."

So Dupont, after walking several times round the ball-room in search of a well-built partner, invited a rather handsome person who fixed her languorous eyes on his with infinite condescension.

Dupont took his place in the dance ; but he had facing him a merry damsel, a pupil of the celebrated Rigolbache, whose bold and eccentric dancing was so renowned that people pushed for places to see her performances. When Dupont, therefore, advanced in his turn to meet this lady he suddenly received a superb high kick full in the face, amidst the shouts of applause and laughter of the spectators.

Dupont alone did not laugh. His nose was smashed and he began to complain, but the jolly damsel said to him,—

"It's your own fault. You're a muff, my good fellow ! you should have known that's the time I do a high kick. When people don't know my step they ought not to dance opposite me. Bribri wouldn't have got that kick ! "

As Dupont's nose pained him greatly and was bleeding, he departed from the ball and went home to bed, saying,—

"Well, I've got enough amusement for to-day ! "

Several days passed and, Dupont's nose being healed, he said to himself,—

"Well, let's have a whack at the ball again. I'm determined not to be done ; only this time I shan't dance."

And Dupont, attracted by the length of a notice, the width of which almost filled a whole column on the boulevard, went into the ball at the Salle Barthelémy. There the crowd was as dense as at l'Opera, but the company was much less refined, and the odor of pipes which was mingled with the smell of the refreshments people were consuming in the hall, the fumes of tobacco and the dust of the dance, gave to this ball a quite distinctive character.

However, Dupont had distinguished a little brunette of pleasing appearance, whose dress was somewhat akin to that of a grisette. She was alone, and he offered her his arm and some punch. The young girl hesitated, and answered,—

"You are very kind. I'm fond of punch, and I would willingly take some if I wasn't afraid of Ronfland."

"And who is Ronfland?"

"He's — he's my sweetheart, a cabinet-maker, a jolly fellow — only he gets tipsy too often. I came to the ball with him and he ought to have danced with me, but he didn't; and he went away and left me here. That's not very nice of him, is it?"

"After M. Ronfland left you here, it seems to me you were free to do as you pleased and to accept my arm and a glass of punch; you can't remain alone in this crowd, you need an escort."

"It's not very entertaining when one's alone,

to be sure! I don't understand Ronfland; he left me near the orchestra, saying, 'Stay there, I'll come back immediately.' And I've been here for more than an hour and he hasn't returned."

"He's forgotten you."

"Oh, I'm sure he's gone to get some refreshment!"

"Without you? That's not very polite! You see well that you've the right to do the same."

"Why, of course I have — well, so much the worse for Ronfland; after all, it is all his fault."

Dupont drew the little brunette's arm within his own, and led her to the ballroom café, where he had some punch brought and poured some out for his new acquaintance, who cheerfully accepted his hospitality, but kept on saying,—

"After this you'll dance with me, won't you, monsieur? For nobody goes to a ball except to dance."

But Dupont, who did not care to join the dance, continued to fill up their glasses as he answered,—

"Yes, later on, there's plenty of time. There are too many people dancing now, we shall be too warm; we'd much better refresh ourselves."

But suddenly a young man, with a kind of cap placed rakishly on one side, came up like a bomb, thumped on the table, upset the punch bowl and the glasses with a turn of the hand, and slapped the little brunette first on one cheek and then on the other, as he exclaimed,—

"So this is how you are conducting yourself, Josephine? I've caught you at it! I brought you to the ball and you play me tricks, flirt with other men. I'll make you behave, you jade!"

Josephine burst into tears, as she cried,—

"Ronfland, you are tipsy. I didn't play you any tricks; you shouldn't have left me — you're a drunkard, and I don't care for you any longer!"

However, Dupont was not in the humor to allow anyone to slap a woman who was with him; he began by picking up the empty punch bowl and using it on Ronfland's nose.

"Hang it," said he, "they crushed mine lately, and I'm not sorry to take my revenge."

But the young man in the cap became furious and sprang at Dupont, and they both rolled on the ground, thumping each other.

The guard came and put Ronfland and his sweetheart out. Dupont was obliged to pay for the breakage, and as he had got a big cut on his head he hurried home, saying,—

"It's only what I deserve; I ought to have foreseen it. Decidedly, I mustn't go to any more balls in search of amusement."

CHAPTER II

Mademoiselle Georgette. Young Colinet

The injuries received at the ball had kept our friend Dupont in his room for a week. He was lodging at a modest hotel in the Rue du Seine, and in order to pass the time of his convalescence, which seemed wearisomely long, our provincial did nothing but look out of the window. As he lodged on the third floor, and as the house opposite was not so high as the hotel, Dupont from the vantage of his window could see perfectly into the room of his opposite neighbor, who lodged in the attics.

"I've not had the best of luck in Paris up to the present," said Dupont reflectively, as he walked slowly about his room with his head swathed in bandages. "I have done all that I could to amuse myself, been everywhere that it seemed likely I should find a little enjoyment, but I can hardly congratulate myself on having been successful; however, I must allow that I sleep much less than I did at Brives-la-Gaillarde, above all since I received this wound on the head. Of one thing I am positively certain, and that is I shan't go to a ball again to look for feminine acquaintances.

But people sometimes go far to seek for that which is right beside them — and in one of these attic rooms opposite I have seen a young girl who is very pleasing to the eye and uncommonly well-built. I can judge of that much better for seeing her in very negligent attire, a dressing-jacket and a little fustian petticoat — so far as I am able to judge from here that simple little costume is most becoming; it shows off her small, supple waist, and her hips are, it must be acknowledged, beautifully formed, it is impossible not to admire such a figure!"

And Dupont, opening his window, although the cold was intense, stood boldly up and fixed his eyes on his neighbor's window. This window was closed, but the curtains were not drawn, and it was easy for him to look in and see the young girl who lived there, for at this very moment she was engaged in doing her hair in front of a little looking-glass which was attached to the fastening of the window.

"She has a roguish little face," said Dupont, "very lively brown eyes and a snub nose, a nose like Roxelana's. Her mouth is rather large, but her teeth are good, and she smiles very agreeably; altogether there's nothing remarkable about her face, and I prefer her figure. Oh, good! She's moving about her room, still in that charming costume, a white dressing-jacket, neatly drawn in at the waist, and that little striped petticoat that hangs

so well on her rounded figure. I can't see either her foot or ankle, but they must be admirable; a small, well-rounded waist always means a well-turned ankle. I'm really madly in love with that waist, I must get acquainted with that young person. She must have noticed my continual staring, but it doesn't seem to have displeased her, she doesn't look at all severe; on the contrary, her face is very cheerful and full of a mischief which seems to invite acquaintance. She must be a working girl. As soon as I can go out I must ask the porter opposite about her. I know how to make these people talk."

While awaiting information, Dupont, all taken up with his neighbor, slept still less, and sometimes did not close his eyes for a whole night. This was something gained, at any rate, and he said musingly,—

"How changed my wife will find me when I go back to Brives-la-Gaillarde. I am only afraid that down there I shall resume my habit of sleeping."

His cut being healed, Dupont could now take off the bandages in which his head had been wrapped. He hastened to leave his room and wend his way to the house of the young girl in the striped skirt and to go into the concierge's room —in Paris all the porters are concierges nowadays, as the shops have become repositories; the wine shops, business houses; hairdressers' shops, rejuvenating parlors; grocers' shops, colonial produce

warehouses; bakers, pastrycooks; dressmakers, tailors; libraries, reading-rooms; cafés, restaurants, even up to those gentlemen who are employed at night, all have changed their former names for finer ones.

Dupont put on his most amiable manner with the concierge and slipped into her hand an irresistible argument, for he found her to be a woman who was not loath to speak; she quickly laid aside her one-sou illustrated paper, and answered her interrogator without taking breath,—

"The young girl who lives on the third floor, the second window to the left, is named Georgette; she's an embroideress. My word! she's clever at it, too; they say she embroiders like a fairy. She's twenty years old, I believe, and she's only been in Paris a short time. She comes from Lorraine; she's very cheerful and willing to talk; however, I believe she is a very virtuous girl, though of course I wouldn't take my oath on it, one can never swear as to those things — one so often gets taken in. But, to be sure, I never see men going to Mademoiselle Georgette's. As to whether she knows any of them outside, that I don't know. You can understand that when she's out I'm not with her. For the rest, she leads a regular enough life; she never goes to a ball, though I don't believe it's because she doesn't wish to, for I've heard her say several times, 'How nice it must be to be able to amuse one's self. Wait till I have

twenty thousand francs income!' But although she has not got it, she's none the less merry. She's always singing; that's all I can tell you about her, for that's all I know."

Dupont scratched his forehead, muttering,—

"Twenty thousand francs income; the deuce! it won't be me who'll give it to her."

Then he resumed,—

"So this young girl is an embroideress."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Of what?"

"What do you mean by 'of what'?"

"I meant to say what does she embroider?"

"Why, collars, handkerchiefs, caps, everything that they embroider."

"Then I might ask her to embroider something for me."

"Certainly, if you wish to do so."

"Very well; I shall go up to Mademoiselle Georgette's, then."

"It's on the third floor, monsieur."

"Yes, I know."

"Yes, but there are several doors; it's the one where there's a toothbrush for a bell handle."

"I'll remember it."

While going upstairs, Dupont mused,—

"What the devil can I ask her to embroider? Oh, a cravat. I don't think it's the style for men to wear embroidered cravats, but no matter. I shall tell her it's the fashion in Brives-la-Gaillarde;

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besides, what does it matter to the young girl provided she gets the work to do?"

Dupont had by this time arrived at the third floor, where there were several doors; but he perceived the toothbrush attached to the bell pull, and he boldly seized it.

Mademoiselle Georgette herself opened the door, and smiled mischievously when she saw who had come to see her. The young girl still wore a white dressing-jacket and a little fustian skirt; this costume was very becoming to her, it brought out all her points. If we dared, we would say that this costume is becoming to all women — adding, however, provided they are well-made.

"Is this Mademoiselle Georgette, the embroideress?" said Dupont, assuming a fatherly air.

"Yes, monsieur, that's me."

"Mademoiselle — I have come — I should be very much pleased — they told me —"

"Come in, monsieur, I can't talk to you on the landing."

Dupont desired nothing better than to respond to this invitation, he entered this room which he had as yet only half seen through the window. The furniture was extremely simple, but everything was exquisitely neat; the floor was waxed and polished, and there was not a grain of dust on anything; the bed was well-made and very white, and the whole condition of the place highly creditable to the person who dwelt there. Demosthenes,

"Mademoiselle, I came to—"
"For something, I presume, monsieur?"

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interrogated as to what constituted an orator, replied, "Elocution, elocution, elocution"; a philosophical king, asked as to what would cause the ramparts of a city to fall, answered, "Money, money, money"; and Ninon, of whom someone inquired what she considered the true adornment of woman, responded, "Propriety, propriety, propriety."

The young girl offered Dupont a chair; she did the honors of her simple abode with infinite ease, and was not at all abashed in the presence of this gentleman. He it was, on the contrary, who in trying to assume an important manner became embarrassed and found it difficult to speak, the more so as Mademoiselle Georgette waited for him to do so as if she was restraining a great desire to laugh.

"Mademoiselle, I came to —"

"For something, I presume, monsieur?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; they told me that you did embroidery."

"They told you quite right. You have something you want embroidered?"

"Yes, — that's to say — I am not sure if they wear embroidered cravats in Paris?"

"No, monsieur; they are no longer in fashion."

"Oh, and what about cuffs?"

"Just the same."

"And — handkerchiefs?"

"For ladies? — oh, yes, monsieur, they embroider very beautifully on handkerchiefs."

"Oh, very well — they do embroider handkerchiefs!"

Dupont all the time he was talking was looking at the young girl's feet; these feet were small, even tiny, beautifully arched, and her ankles were very slender; these things distracted him and he muttered more than once,—

"So they do embroider handkerchiefs."

Presently Mademoiselle Georgette burst into a peal of laughter, which finished her visitor's discomfiture; he looked at her in astonishment, saying,—

"You are very cheerful, according to what I see, mademoiselle."

"Yes, monsieur, I am not a prey to melancholy."

"And might one ask what provoked your merriment in this instance?"

"Why, it was you, monsieur."

"Me! Oh, it was I who made you laugh? You think me very comical, then, mademoiselle?"

"Comical is not the word, monsieur; but truly, I don't think you are very apt at finding a pretext."

"A pretext — what do you mean? I don't quite understand you."

"It's very easy to understand, however; you wanted to have a motive — a reason for coming to my room, for you have nothing you want embroidered."

"What made you think that, mademoiselle?"

"Do you think I don't recognize you, monsieur?"

"Oh, you recognize me?"

"Of course I do, you live in the small hotel opposite, and you pass all your time in staring at me from there, and making eyes at me."

"Oh, you've noticed that?"

Here Dupont bridled up again; he was pleased to have been noticed, and he drew a favorable augury from the fact. The young embroideress continued,—

"Yes, monsieur, I've noticed that. Unless I was blind, I could not help seeing you. And then the other day you stationed yourself at the open window when it was horribly cold, and your nose was as blue as it could be. I had a great desire to make faces at you!"

Here Dupont compressed his lips and did not bridle up.

"I didn't make any because I thought, seeing your head all wrapped up, bandaged, that you were either wounded or ill, and one must pity those who suffer; but it seems that you're well now?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, I had been fighting a duel, and I was wounded on the head."

"Oh, you were fighting a duel? Perhaps you won't think me too curious if I ask you what was the motive of this duel?"

"It was a very distinguished lady with whom

I happened to be and whom a stranger looked at a little too closely."

"So you fought for a lady! Good enough! I forgive your sheep's eyes now; but, monsieur, after all, why did you come to see me to-day?"

"Since you are so quick at divining, mademoiselle, you might have suspected. I saw you from my window, I thought you charming and I wished to make your acquaintance."

"Well done! that is frank enough! and what object have you in making my acquaintance? Perhaps you hope to make me — your mistress."

"Mademoiselle, I don't go so far as to say that."

"No, but you think it? Isn't that always what the men are trying to do when they meet a poor girl who is weak enough, foolish enough, to believe them? But I wish to warn you that you will lose your time with me."

"At any rate, mademoiselle, it would be difficult to lose time more agreeably than in your company."

"You're very complimentary; but, monsieur, I must confess that I would much rather know people before allowing them to visit me in my room — and I don't know you."

"That's right, mademoiselle, that's very right; it's necessary to know with whom one is dealing."

And Dupont, who had prepared a little story in advance, settled himself in his chair and went on,—

"Mademoiselle, I came from the United States. I was formerly in business, but I have retired; I have sufficient means to enable me to follow my pleasure; I am a widower without chick or child, and, consequently, I can do as I please."

"Very good, monsieur. And your name is?"

"My name is Dupont."

"Dupont! Why, that is quite a French name; I thought they had rather English names in the United States."

"That depends on their origin — my family was French. Now that you know who I am, you will allow me to pay my respects to you sometimes, won't you?"

"I see nothing to prevent it, provided you haven't lied to me. For I warn you, I detest people who tell falsehoods."

Dupont bowed and, scratching his nose, answered,—

"Mademoiselle, you desired to know who I was, I have satisfied you on that point. Will it be allowable on my part—"

"To inquire who I am? Oh, that is soon told; you already know that my name is Georgette, that I am an embroideress. I was born at Toul, a pretty town in Lorraine, in the neighborhood of Nancy. My parents are poor; there are three sisters of us, of whom I am the youngest; my two elder sisters came to Paris in the hope of being more fortunate here and of being able to assist our

parents — they were unsuccessful. Poor sisters! Then they returned to our home."

"And you came to Paris in your turn. I wonder that your parents allowed you to come. They must have felt afraid that you would be no more fortunate than your sisters."

"Oh, but I wanted to come to Paris; I had resolved upon it, and when I make up my mind to do a thing, I do it."

"That shows determination of character."

"Yes, monsieur, and I am very determined."

"And since you have been in Paris, have you enjoyed yourself."

"Oh, so, so! — not very much. Certainly there is plenty to amuse one in Paris, one may take one's choice of pleasures. Plays, balls, promenades, concerts, are all delightful to those who can procure the means of frequenting them. But when one stays in one's room all day long and passes one's evenings in sewing or reading, one hardly enjoys living in Paris."

"That is true; but what prevents you from having all the pleasure you desire?"

"Why, it's because a woman can't go alone to the play or walk about by herself."

"No, of course not, but you can't have lacked cavaliers who were quite ready to escort you."

"But, then, I don't go with everybody, monsieur; I don't accept the arm of the first comer. Certainly, if I had listened to all the young men

who have followed me about, and who have wearied me with their foolish declarations of love — love which took them suddenly when they saw me passing along the street,—oh, opportunities have not been lacking! But that isn't what I want."

Dupont caressed his chin as he thought,—

"She's hard to please; she doesn't want to go about with a mere boy; she wants to make acquaintance with a proper sort of a man. All the chances are in my favor."

Mademoiselle Georgette had resumed her embroidery and looked slyly from under her lashes at the face her visitor was making. The latter watched her work and exclaimed,—

"Mademoiselle, you embroider to perfection."

"Do you think so, monsieur? Do you know anything about embroidery?"

"Yes, I have a wi — a sister who embroiders also."

"She is in the United States?"

"Yes, and she is going to stay there."

"As to me, monsieur, it isn't anything wonderful if I can embroider well; I come from a district renowned for its embroideries. It is at Nancy that the very finest embroidery is made."

"And you are from Nancy?"

"No, but Toul is close by. Well, then, do you want me to embroider you some handkerchiefs?"

Dupont laughed, then he answered,—

"By Jove! no; and since you so easily found

out that I came here in the hope of making your acquaintance, mademoiselle, shall I have the happiness of being allowed to cultivate it, to come and see you, and even to escort you to the play or take you for a walk?"

Mademoiselle Georgette reflected for some moments, looked at Dupont and said,—

"You have not lied to me in what you have said about your circumstances? You are entirely without ties and a widower?"

Dupont answered without hesitation,—

"No, mademoiselle, I have not lied to you."

"In that case, monsieur, come and visit me. I shall be very pleased to see you."

"Oh, mademoiselle, you make me the happiest of men!"

"But you mustn't stay too long when you come, because that would compromise me."

Dupont rose, bowed to the young embroideress, and departed.

"She'll be mine yet," he said, as he went down. "I shall perhaps have to wait longer than I wish, but it's only a question of time. She'll be mine, and I have no desire at all to sleep."

A fortnight had elapsed. Dupont came very often to his neighbor's room; he was more taken with her than ever, for in addition to her personal charms mademoiselle possessed wit, gayety, and very pleasing conversational powers, all of which was more than sufficient to turn the head of our

provincial friend, who had lost his appetite and did not sleep for two hours together at night because his love was as yet unrequited and was fed daily to a fiercer flame by the sight of the object which had evoked it. But in one respect he was no further advanced than on the first day of his acquaintance. If he took the young girl's hand she laughingly drew it away. If he tried to put his arm around her waist she assumed a severe expression and said to him, in a very decided tone,—

"If you don't have done I shall show you the door, and you won't come in again."

Then Dupont understood that it would be well for him to comport himself with more decorum, and he would take himself off, muttering,—

"It will take me a long time — much longer than I had expected, but in the end I must be successful, for if I had not made an impression on this young girl she would not receive my calls or go out with me,— and she would not accept my presents. She pretends to be hard-hearted, but she's only leading me on. That is her coquetry, craft; but there! it cannot last forever."

In fact, mademoiselle was perfectly willing to accompany Dupont to the play, to a concert, or to take his arm for a walk. As to the dancing hall, Dupont did not offer to go there, and she did not seem to desire to go either; what she had always refused, up to this time, was to dine with him at a restaurant, in a private room.

"I like to dine with you at the restaurant very much," said she to Dupont, "but we will dine in the public room, with everybody else."

In vain Dupont repeated,—

"They don't serve you so well in the dining-room, and then, it's bad form — ladies who dine at the restaurant never sit at the public table."

Georgette was inflexible, she would not yield. Generally, she did not look as if she went with Dupont for the sake of being in his company, but rather as if she went to see what was going on in the world and to be seen herself.

Georgette's dress was very simple, and Dupont sagely reflected,—

"One may sometimes win a woman through her love of adornment, her vanity."

Following this reasoning, he sent the young embroideress a very pretty shawl, a silk dress, and a fashionable bonnet. She had received these presents without making any ado, and the same day, even, she decked herself out in them to go with him to the Opera-Comique; and when on bringing her back in the evening Dupont asked permission to go up to her room for a minute or two she shut the door in his face, saying,—

"What now? It's quite enough to let you come in during the daytime."

When out with Dupont, Georgette frequently made conquests, and then our provincial became exceedingly jealous, for he found his companion

was sometimes rather absent-minded and that she gave to other men that attention which he craved for himself.

The damsel appeared to have a strong vein of curiosity; often at the theatre she pointed out some handsome young dandy and said to Dupont,—

"Do you know that gentleman in the box opposite, who holds an opera glass in his hand?"

"No, I don't know him at all," answered Dupont, ill-humoredly, "I don't know anybody in Paris."

"Oh, true enough! I forgot you were from America. That's a pity."

"What's a pity?"

"Why, that you don't know anybody in Paris."

"And if I did know the young man you pointed out, what good would it do you?"

"Why, none at all — it was simply for the sake of knowing."

Then another time it was a man of middle age, but who was attired in the latest fashion and assumed all the manners of a young dandy, whom Mademoiselle Georgette noticed as they were walking along and whom she pointed out to her faithful swain, again putting the question,—

"Do you know who that gentleman is?"

"And how the devil do you think I should know?"

"That's so, you come from the United States! I didn't think of that."

Alone in his own room, Dupont pondered on this.

"Why," said he to himself, "does she thus question me in regard to the men we meet in our walks or at the theatre? She can't suppose it's very amusing to me. She's very coquettish, is this young damsel — she lowers her eyes so modestly when anyone glances at her, she looks as though she delighted in making a good impression! However, she is prudent, very prudent, nobody should know that better than I. But she likes nothing better than to go about and show herself. Oh, she's extremely well-made. When she's on my arm everybody admires her walk, her figure, above all her foot and ankle. How can anyone help falling in love with such perfection? I've lost my appetite for both meat and drink — and for a long time past I've lost my sleep; — I'm growing thin visibly, and if this keeps on, instead of looking like Punch, I shall look like a clown in a pantomime."

Dupont had one day been for some minutes with his pretty neighbor; he was watching her embroider and trying to persuade her that he was very much in love with her, but the young girl listened to him indifferently, as one who is thinking of something else than what is being said to her, when two raps were heard at the door.

"Is someone knocking at your door?" said Dupont, appearing surprised.

"Why, yes, I thought I heard a knock."

"Do you expect anyone?"

"No; but that's no reason why some one shouldn't come. You came, and I wasn't expecting you."

"Wait, they're knocking again; oh, I'm sure it's at your door."

"Come in," cried Georgette, "the key is in the door."

In fact, the young embroideress always carefully left the key outside when Dupont was with her, in order to give less chance for gossip.

Some one opened the door, and a young man appeared and paused on the doorsill.

He must have been about twenty, though he hardly looked it. His fresh, open face was very boyish; his big blue eyes, gentle and affectionate, had almost the charm of a woman's; a light down covered his chin; his forehead was still white and unwrinkled, and his light chestnut hair hung about it naturally. He was, in fact, a very handsome boy of middle height, but with well-rounded limbs and graceful figure, and his dress was neither that of a peasant nor that of a denizen of Paris.

He wore almost tight cloth trousers, over which he had high leather gaiters, a velvet waistcoat with metal buttons, and a heavy hunting-jacket made of cloth with a rough nap. He held in his hand a round-shaped felt hat with a broad brim and a big knotty stick.

"Does Mamzelle Georgette live here, if you please?" he asked.

But at the accents of that voice, the young embroideress rose quickly, exclaiming,—

"Colinet — it is Colinet!"

And she ran towards the individual who appeared; she took his hand, put her arms around his neck, and kissed him several times, with every token of the most heartfelt joy, saying,—

"Dear old Colinet, how delighted I am to see you!"

And the young man answered,—

"And I also am very pleased to see you again, Georgette. For I had no idea Paris was so big, and when I first saw it I feared I should never find you!"

Dupont looked on at all this with a singular expression of countenance, as he thought,—

"It seems that she lets him kiss her! — in fact, he fared still better, for she was the first to kiss him. Deuce take it! shall I ever be anything but an idiot. It's very mortifying."

Georgette took the young man by the hand, made him come in, and presented him to M. Dupont, saying,—

"This is one of the friends of my infancy. Oh, yes, we often played together when we were little, didn't we, Colinet?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle Georgette."

"That's all very well, so long as they don't want

to play together now," thought Dupont, who was forced to confess that the young man was a very taking fellow; then he said to Georgette,—

"Is monsieur from your part of the country?"

"Yes, of course, he's just come from there. Haven't you just arrived, Colinet?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, I arrived yesterday evening at the 'Tin Plate' hotel, Saint Martin's Square, where I'm staying."

"My mother? my father? my sisters? Tell me all about them?"

"Everybody is well, thank heaven, and everybody told me to kiss you for them."

"Well, then, kiss me for each one."

Young Colinet hastened to obey Georgette's bidding, and began kissing her again. Dupont made a face as long as a yardstick, and grumbled to himself,—

"Do they want to pass all their time kissing each other? This chap's got more kisses in two minutes than I've been able to obtain in a month. I must really change my tactics."

When young Colinet had done kissing her, Georgette made him sit down and said to him,—

"Didn't my sisters give you any messages for me?"

"Oh, excuse me! Mademoiselle Aimée, your eldest sister, gave me a letter for you. I've got it in my pocket here."

"Oh, give it to me — give it to me quick!"

M. Colinet handed Georgette a letter; she seized it quickly and went to the window to read it, without troubling about her company.

Dupont then turned towards the newcomer, and said to him,—

"Were you ever in Paris before?"

"No, monsieur, this is the first time."

"Do you intend to remain here?"

"Oh, no, monsieur, I even promised my mother not to stay longer than four days. I'm going back home on Saturday."

This answer was highly satisfactory to Dupont. He began to look more amiable.

"You are in business?"

"I raise sheep, and my father raises calves."

"That's a fine occupation; our forefathers were more or less given to cattle raising; we of today content ourselves with eating them, which is not as useful, since it doesn't tend to multiply the races."

Dupont, satisfied at knowing that young Colinet would only remain for a short time in Paris, took his hat and said to his neighbor,—

"I will leave you with your countryman. You must have much to say to a friend of your childhood."

CHAPTER III

An Ingenuous Youth. A Private Room

When Dupont went to call upon his pretty neighbor during the next day, he found young Colinet still there. The youth looked quite as bashful and ill at ease as on the evening before. He was sitting opposite Georgette and watching her as she worked at her embroidery without breathing a word; but, despite his shyness, his expression was radiant, as though it made him very happy merely to sit and look at her.

"Well, M. Colinet," said Dupont, "and how have you been amusing yourself since I saw you yesterday? Have you been learning your way about Paris?"

"Yes a little; I've been to see the animals in the Jardin des Plantes, monsieur; but I like my sheep and lambs much better than I do the lions and tigers, and I can't help wondering why they give savage and cruel beasts like those such fine cages, while my harmless and useful sheep often have no pens."

"Why," answered Dupont, smiling at the honest fellow's utter simplicity, "you know they are obliged to put the tigers into iron cages because

the beasts are savage and they are afraid of them, — as for your sheep, they harm nobody, and so no one takes any notice of them and they are left to graze in freedom."

"My sheep don't always find enough to graze on in the fields, while I've seen them give huge quantities of meat to your savage tigers."

"That's for precisely the same reason; they are afraid of them, so they have to keep them well fed."

"Colinet, you must go to the play while you are in Paris."

"With you, Mamzelle Georgette?"

"Yes, M. Dupont here will take both of us."

"Come, that's good!" said Dupont to himself. "So I must treat M. Colinet too; still, I'd rather do that than have her go there with him alone."

"Will you kindly take us to the theatre this evening, monsieur?" resumed Georgette, addressing Dupont.

"Why, of course, mademoiselle, with the very greatest pleasure. Am I not always at your orders, and only too happy to make myself agreeable to you?"

"Yes, monsieur, I know you are extremely obliging; but I don't want to take advantage of your good-nature."

"You cannot put it too greatly to the proof. You are aware of my feeling towards you; I have made no secret of the fact that I am your faithful knight."

Young Colinet looked from Dupont to Georgette; he seemed as if he could not quite make them out. The pretty embroideress burst into a fit of laughter as she said,—

"Then we will go to the Cirque-Nationale; they play pantomimes with dissolving views, which will amuse you very much, Colinet."

"I will go wherever you like, Mamzelle Georgette."

"That's singular," said Dupont to himself, "she speaks very familiarly to the young man; she doesn't address him as monsieur, but it is quite otherwise with him; however, that is much better than if it was the other way about."

In the evening Dupont took Mademoiselle Georgette and young Colinet to the Theatre du Cirque, on the Boulevard du Temple. I need not tell you that some of the many theatres which formerly made this boulevard so gay are not yet demolished. They played a pantomime where the dances mingle with the illusion, changing with the decorations. The rather slight costumes of the dancers made Colinet lower his eyes and sometimes even turn his head away, in contra-distinction to most of the spectators, who pointed their opera glasses at the ladies of the ballet.

"Come, what are you thinking of now?" exclaimed Dupont, nudging the young man; "you don't look at the best evolutions."

Colinet reddened as he answered,—

"I'm afraid of making those ladies angry if I look at them when they take those high kicks on our side."

"Poor fellow, he certainly is not dangerous," said Dupont to himself. "But, all the same, my pretty embroideress doesn't pay any attention to anybody but him; when I speak to her she hardly answers me, and she looks as if she weren't listening to me. The sooner the young friend of her infancy returns to his sheep the better I shall like it."

Dupont's wishes were soon fulfilled; on Saturday Colinet said good-by to Georgette. She gave him two letters to take to her sisters and several kisses for her parents. The young man departed sadly, saying to Georgette,—

"Why don't you come back with me? I should be so happy to take you home to the country — do you like Paris so much, mamzelle?"

"It isn't that I like it so much, Colinet, but I ought to stay here for a time yet — I must stay."

"And shall you have to stay for long?"

"I don't know; I hope not. I assure you, Colinet, that the day I return to my parents' house will be the happiest one in my life."

"And so it will be for me, mamzelle."

"Really Colinet? you feel, then, a good deal of friendship for me?"

"I don't know if that's what I feel, but I should like never to leave you."

"We shall see each other again, Colinet; think of me sometimes. For my part, I shan't forget you."

"Oh, Mamzelle Georgette, that promise makes me very happy."

And to prove his joy the poor boy gave way to tears; then he kissed Georgette and ran off as fast as his legs could carry him, because he felt that if he stayed any longer he should lack the courage to depart.

Dupont called on his neighbor in the afternoon; he found her sad and thoughtful, and he said to her,—

"I suppose the young shepherd is gone?"

"Yes, monsieur. He's very fortunate, for he will see my father and my mother."

"No doubt. But, after all, it's very monotonous to see nothing but sheep. Look you, charming Georgette, there is no other such place as Paris. It's the abode of all the pleasures; it is there that all our men of great talent win the applause and renown which are their due. In fact, one really lives in Paris; while elsewhere one only vegetates."

"If that were true, monsieur, it would be very unfortunate for a good many people, for the entire world cannot live in Paris. But I think that one may be very happy elsewhere, when one is near those whom one loves and when one knows how to limit one's desires."

"That's right, charming Georgette; you speak

like Virgil and like Delille. It was, I believe, the latter who said,—

True pleasure in the country ever doth abide ;
There men most fear the gods, and best make love beside.

As to making love, however, not that I dispute Delille, they make it very well in Paris,— they approach perfection indeed, in that respect ; and if only you were a little less severe with me — But you are absent-minded ; it seems to me you are not listening to me."

" What were you saying to me, monsieur ? "

" There ! I was sure of it ; you were not listening to me. But I will excuse you ; your young friend's departure has saddened you. Let's see, you must have some amusement ; tomorrow is Sunday, we must go somewhere. Will you come to dinner with me at a restaurant ? "

" I should like that very much."

" I will come here and get you at five o'clock. We'll go and have dinner at Bonvalet's on the boulevard."

" Wherever you like — it's all the same to me."

" Yes, yes ; we'll go to Bonvalet's, everything's good there ; and afterwards go to one of the theatres opposite. That's understood and settled ; and until then, I'll leave you to your reflections. Good-by, my dear neighbor, till tomorrow."

Dupont went off rubbing his hands and saying to himself,—

" Tomorrow will see me successful. From here

I shall go to Bonvalet's; I shall speak to one of the waiters, I shall attach him to my interests and I shall hire a private room in advance, though I have to pay its weight in gold."

The next day at five o'clock one may imagine that Dupont did not lose any time in going to Georgette's room. He found her dressed ready to go out, but still thoughtful, still anxious in expression.

"You must certainly miss the young friend of your childhood very much," said Dupont to her, smiling. "You who used to be so cheerful and who were always singing; why, I hardly know you."

"It is not Colinet's departure that troubles me," answered Georgette.

"It's not that, hey. Then it must be something else."

"Perhaps it is."

"And are you going to tell me what it is?"

"I believe not."

"Well, then, we may as well go to dinner."

They went to the restaurant on the Boulevard du Temple. Just as they were going up the stairs which led to the first story three gentlemen were coming down who seemed to have been dining very well. One of them, who was opposite Dupont, uttered an exclamation of surprise when he saw the latter, and struck him very playfully in the waistcoat as he exclaimed,—

"Well, now, this is an unexpected meeting; why, Dupont, my dear fellow, you are in Paris and haven't been to see me?"

Dupont became scarlet, he stammered, hung down his head and muttered,—

"Why, is it you, Jolibois? Good-day. How are you? Good-by."

And he endeavored to pass with Georgette, whose hand was on his arm; but M. Jolibois took hold of his arm, saying,—

"Well, now, must you be in such a hurry when you meet an old friend? And how long is it since you left Brives-la-Gaillarde? and your wife, is she with you? You can't run away from me, look you; for I am pleased to see you, my good fellow. Do you still sleep like a dormouse? for that's just what you did when I was in Brives-la-Gaillarde, and your wife used to complain of it; yes, she complained of it a good deal, did your dear better half!"

Dupont was in torture; if he had dared, he would have given his friend Jolibois a good punch to make him loose his hold, at the risk of causing him to roll down the stairs. But he restrained himself and endeavored to disengage his arm, saying,—

"Jolibois, you've dined — and dined very well, as I can see; but madame and I have not dined, and we want to rejoin the party who are waiting for us upstairs. I will come and see you, but leave

me now, Jolibois. Come, my dear lady, they are waiting for us."

And making a new effort, Dupont this time managed to get his arm free. He immediately led Georgette up the stairs, leaving his friend Jolibois, who, as he watched the couple go up, shouted,—

"Oh, you humbug! do you think you can take me in? But I understand, I see how it is. Dupont, you're a humbug; but you needn't be uneasy, I shan't tell your wife."

Georgette said not a word; she had mercy on the piteous state into which this encounter had thrown her cavalier. They reached the corridor of the first floor; Dupont recognized his waiter and went to meet him,—

"Waiter, we should like a table in one of the large dining-rooms."

"There are none, monsieur, they are all occupied. On Sunday it is very difficult to find one free, unless you come very early. But I happen to have a private room, which someone is just about to leave, and I'll let you have that."

Dupont looked at Georgette, who answered,—

"We wish to dine in a public room. We'll go and take a turn on the boulevard and come back a little later on, when you can probably find us a place."

"Just as you like, sweetheart," said Dupont, who dared not insist, because the meeting with his

friend Jolibois had rendered him quite crestfallen, but who as he went off made other signs to the waiter.

They returned to the boulevard, but the weather was not fine, it was drizzling and there was mud even on the asphalt; but despite that, being Sunday, there were a good many people on the boulevards, because in Paris, whatever the weather, there are a number of people who absolutely must walk, and who, when the rain comes down in torrents and scatters them, reappear a few minutes later armed with umbrellas and walk along, looking at the shops as unconcernedly as though it were the height of summer.

Dupont had offered his arm to Georgette; he did not know how to begin the conversation, for he was very much embarrassed. The young girl enjoyed his confusion for some moments, then she exclaimed,—

"Well, now, Monsieur l'Americain of Brives-la-Gaillarde, the meeting with your friend Jolibois seems to have made you quite dumb, and that would indeed be a pity, for you sometimes say very pretty things."

Dupont endeavored to resume his usual assurance and answered,—

"My charming neighbor, I confess that this meeting was not very pleasing to me."

"Oh, that I can well believe."

"First of all, Jolibois was tipsy—it was very

easy to see that he had been drinking and did not know what he was saying. He recognized me and later on took me for another—"

Georgette interrupted him ; she looked him full in the eyes and said very dryly,—

" M. Dupont, do you take me for an idiot?"

" Me, mademoiselle? Why, God forbid. I've had time to learn, on the contrary, that you have a good deal of mind — that your reasoning is perfect — that you also possess much tact and not a little mischief."

" Then, monsieur, don't try to impose upon me longer with the falsehoods you have been telling me all along, and in which, to tell you the truth, I always put very little faith ; for you look a good deal more like a Limousin than like an American. You have never been in America ; you came from Brives-la-Gaillarde, as your friend Jolibois said. But what I can least forgive you is that you passed yourself off for a widower while your wife is still alive. For shame ! monsieur, for shame ! to disown your wife ! That is unworthy."

Dupont saw it was no use to lie; he stammered,—

" Mademoiselle — well, yes, it's true ; I confess. But I so greatly desired to make your acquaintance, and had I told you I was married you would not perhaps have consented to receive me."

" And why not? On the contrary, that would have given me more confidence in you. I should

have said, 'There's a man who is not seeking to deceive me.' But to pretend to be a widower; to wish to act the bachelor here while your poor wife is mourning your absence, no doubt!"

"Oh, no, as to that you can be quite easy; my wife is not mourning my absence at all. She was one of the first to advise me to come to Paris and to come here without her."

"And to say you were a bachelor?"

"Oh, I don't say that she went so far as that; but when a wife allows her husband to travel without her she is usually quite willing that he should play the bachelor; in fact, my dear little neighbor, since men are not nuns, you may very well understand —"

"Enough, monsieur, enough! Not another word on the subject."

"Oh, I ask nothing better than to drop it. Why, it seems to me the drizzling is turning to rain."

"Yes, it is raining. Let us go back to the restaurant; perhaps there will be places now."

They returned to Bonvalet's, where the waiter said as before,—

"All the tables in the public room are occupied; but I happen to have a private room which I advise you to take at once before some one else takes it."

Dupont looked inquiringly at Georgette, who answered,—

"Well, let us take the private room, since we cannot do otherwise."

Our gallant was delighted. The waiter led the couple into a small room, where it was very warm and snug, and where two covers were already laid.

"One would really think they had expected us," said Georgette, as she laid aside her bonnet and shawl.

"At a restaurant they are always expecting somebody."

"Yes, but two covers all ready."

"The room is probably intended only for two persons."

"It's no matter ; order the dinner quickly, monsieur, for I am very hungry."

"I should like to know what you prefer."

"Oh, I like everything."

"And I dislike nothing ; so that matter is soon settled."

Dupont ordered a well-chosen dinner, very dainty and choice, and with a great variety of wines. He wanted to seat himself on a sofa beside Georgette, but the latter obliged him to take a place opposite her, on the other side of the table, saying,—

"You will crowd me if you sit there, and I like to eat my dinner comfortably."

"I mustn't contradict her," said Dupont to himself, "I must go softly ; I must overlook a good many things. Wait till we have had some of these generous wines."

Georgette did honor to the dinner, but she drank very little, although her companion did his best to induce her to take more, exclaiming as he poured out the first beaune,—

"Don't on any account put water with this wine — that would be murder; it's the very best beaune there is."

"It's exactly the same to me," answered the young embroideress; "I never drink wine alone, I prefer it with water."

"That's all right in regard to ordinary wine, but with this, which costs four francs a bottle, it's a crime to put water."

"Then, my dear M. Dupont, I must ask you to give me some ordinary wine, for surely you don't want to make me commit a crime."

Dupont was vexed; but to make up for his disappointment in regard to his young companion, he was careful not only to drink his beaune unadulterated, but to drink enough of it to restore his assurance and his cheerfulness. He soon began to risk some rather tender speeches; but Georgette interrupted him suddenly by saying,—

"And your wife, is she pretty?"

Dupont scowled and answered, after a pause,—

"She's not bad looking, but she is not so well made as you are, not by a long way. I only wish she had your figure."

"Are her eyes dark or blue?"

"They're gray — like those of cats."

"Oh, what a pity! What, your wife has cat's eyes?"

"That's all the same to me. What a sweet mouth you have yourself; your smile is enchanting."

"And are her teeth good?"

"Whose teeth?"

"Why, your wife's."

"Good heavens! mademoiselle, are you only going to talk to me about my wife? I may as well tell you that it was not for that that I wanted you to take dinner with me."

"That's very possible, but that subject of conversation is very pleasing to me."

"Besides, beautiful Georgette, must I repeat to you again that in Paris I have no wife, I am a bachelor once more —"

"Oh, I know well enough you want to make people believe you are one. But as to that, my dear M. Dupont, you may rest quite assured of one thing, which is that it's perfectly indifferent to me whether you be married or a bachelor."

Dupont inquired mentally how he ought to take that, and ended by pouring some grenache for his companion, remarking to her,—

"This is the wine for ladies; it's very sweet and will not bear water."

Georgette swallowed a sip of grenache, and put her glass down.

"I don't like these sugary wines," she said.

"Hang it, what is it that she does like, then?" said Dupont; and to console himself, he emptied his glass at one draught.

But by the means he employed to regain his assurance this gentleman became as red as his friend Jolibois, and when they brought the champagne he had left his chair and was asking Georgette to dance the polka with him. The latter laughed in his face and sent him back to his place; Dupont poured some champagne for himself, and offered some to the young girl, exclaiming,—

"Do you dislike champagne also?"

"Oh, no, that has a briskness, a sparkle which keeps one awake. Does your wife like it?"

Dupont struck his fist on the table, then he shouted,—

"Decidedly you are making game of me; but you'll pay me for it. That deserves vengeance, and I'm going to revenge myself by kissing you."

As he said these words he rose, darted towards Georgette and tried to clasp her waist; but the latter stopped him with a firm hand and said,—

"M. Dupont, none of these games here, or I shall be very seriously angry."

"What, angelic creature, will you still refuse me a kiss?"

"I shall always refuse you everything of the kind, be persuaded of that."

"But — but — why then you've been playing with me, making game of me."

"And how have I made fun of you, monsieur?"

"What do you mean? In what? Why in everything. When a person accepts gallantries, a man's attentions, when she is willing to accept presents from him — a shawl, a bonnet, I know not what all — it isn't to send him walking later, do you understand, mademoiselle?"

"I understand, monsieur, that you are as foolish as you are impertinent. When have I ever allowed you to think that I would be anything more to you than a friendly acquaintance? You reproach me because I took a few miserable presents. I have given you a great deal more in consenting to receive you, to go out walking with you, to go to the play with you, to put my arm in yours. Do you count all that nothing, monsieur?"

"I don't say that. But you have consented to dine with me in a private room, and when a woman does that — she doesn't do it to play the prude, everybody knows that."

"Monsieur, I felt quite safe in dining with you, for you have never endangered my peace of mind."

"Then why have you refused up to this time?"

"Because I did not wish to give you hopes which you could not realize."

"And why did you accept to-day?"

"Because it tired me to walk in the rain. But be easy, monsieur, it won't happen again."

Dupont was very vexed; but his self-conceit, the wine he had taken, the mocking glances of the

young girl, who seemed to be defying him, all mounted to his head and this time he decided to brave Mademoiselle Georgette's anger; he tried to kiss her; a slap in the face rudely applied was the price of his audacity.

"Leave me, monsieur," said Georgette, rising, "you are impertinent. I don't wish to remain a moment longer with you."

"I'm very sorry for that, my fair neighbor, but I can't let you go," answered Dupont, who was excited and who had seized hold of the little striped skirt which Georgette wore under her gown. "No, no; I hold this delightful little skirt which becomes you so well, which I have admired, contemplated so often, and I shan't let go of it."

"Oh, well, keep it then, monsieur, for it is all that you will have of me."

So saying, Georgette immediately managed to let her skirt fall about her feet. She jumped over it, snatched up her cap and shawl and ran from the room before Dupont, who still clasped the little striped petticoat in his hand, had recovered from his astonishment.

CHAPTER IV

The Second Skirt. The Gentleman Who Did Not Ruin Himself For The Fair Sex

Very early in the morning on the day after the dinner which had had so unsatisfactory an ending for Dupont, Mademoiselle Georgette left her modest chamber in the Rue du Seine, for at the half term, foreseeing that she might need to do so, she had been careful to give notice to her landlord.

This time she rented a small apartment in the Marais, on the Boulevard Beaumarchais, where very fine, handsomely built houses now replace the quiet walks shaded by grand old trees which in former times had continually served as delightful meeting-places, where the young lovers of the immediate neighborhood had found the seclusion they desired.

The young embroideress had substituted for her attic room an apartment which was in itself very modest, but which indicated a less precarious position and more means; it was more comfortably furnished also, and although it was not the abode of a fashionable woman, neither was it that of a grisette.

Mademoiselle Georgette had also changed her occupation; she had quitted that of embroidering and assumed that of shirtmaking and, as she could sew as well as she could embroider, she did not lack work.

Her little fustian skirt was also succeeded by one of black silk, which flowed in simple folds about her graceful figure, and was short enough to show a very slender ankle, from which sprang a shapely plump calf.

In her little home the pleasing shirtmaker still kept the costume she had worn in the Rue du Seine; a snow-white dressing jacket, fitting closely to her slim waist, and the short petticoat which became her so well. Add to those, spotless white stockings, a small, well-shod foot, and you may be sure that she would have turned the head of any man who had seen her in this provoking negligé.

Georgette this time lived at the end of a court; but the court was handsome, airy, and well-kept, forming a regular square. The apartments at the end of the court naturally had an outlook on the boulevard and on the court, while those situated on either side had a view of the court only, and when the occupants placed themselves at their windows they only needed leisure to allow them to observe all that went on in the houses opposite.

Georgette occupied two small rooms in an

entresol.[1] Above her lived an old lady of independent means with her domestic, and the united ages of the pair mounted up to more than a century. In the story above that dwelt some good shopkeepers, who always went to bed at half past ten; and above that again, a lady who gave music lessons. The main body of the building to her left was occupied by, first, an unmarried clerk, who kept a maid-of-all-work. Then, a lady of uncertain age who had been very pretty and was still very coquettish, and who made up with rice powder, cold cream, rouge, blue, and black, and regretted the patches with which the ladies formerly covered their faces, but who, with the aid of a black pin made red-hot, had made two beauty spots; one on her left cheek, and the other in a place where no one ever saw it.

But if no one ever saw it, you are about to say, why did she make one there?

Oh, you are too curious. Those who are endowed with second sight, don't they see everything, even that which is invisible to other mortals? The second beauty spot was for these latter; magnetism is a precious science.

Above this lady, who called herself Madame Picotee, were two young men who were engaged in the pursuit of literature; which, however, did not deter them from gazing at their neighbors

[1] Entresol: mezzanine floor. A low story peculiar to French houses, placed between the groundfloor and the first floor.

when the latter were pleasing. In the courtyard to the left, on the first floor, was a staymaker's workshop; on the second floor, a miniature painter; on the third, a photographer; the garret was reserved for the servants' bedrooms.

The main body of the building which looked on the boulevard had the handsomest apartments, and was consequently tenanted by people of higher position. On the first story was a very rich gentleman who had two servants, a housekeeper and a valet. On the second floor was a young married couple; the gentleman was in business, the lady was lackadaisical; madame was pretty and coquettish, monsieur was ugly and a rake; they had a very wide-awake little parlor-maid and a cook who got tipsy.

Finally, the third story was occupied by a young man who had just received his degree as a doctor and to whom nothing was now lacking but patients; he looked for them, he begged for them everywhere; he would have made them had that been possible; but only, be it understood, that he might have the pleasure of caring for them and the reputation of curing them.

Since Mademoiselle Georgette had come to live in the little entresol at the end of the court all eyes had been turned on her, and the feminine part of the community had been the first to seek to know and judge the new neighbor; for women are more curious than men, that is a recognized fact.

It was easy to obtain a sight of the tenant who had lately moved in; it was in the month of April, the springtime, and the weather was very fine; the sun often shone, and Mademoiselle Georgette, who was pleased to receive so distinguished a guest in her little entresol, left her windows open almost every day that he might have free ingress, and, according to her custom, worked beside her casement in the costume you wot of: the dressing-jacket drawn in at the waist and the little skirt smoothly fitted over the hips.

The neighbors, therefore, had every chance of looking at her at their ease; as she was very attractive, very alluring in her simple costume, the ladies did not fail to find that it was unconventional and very unbecoming to its wearer. They decided that the little shirtmaker did not know how to dress herself, and that she had no beauty beyond her youthful freshness.

The lady who rouged even went so far as to say that the young girl's skirt was indecent, because it permitted the outlines of her form to be discerned. It must be conceded that this lady had no outlines herself which could by any possibility be discerned; but as a set-off or indemnification she was very fond of going to the circus to watch the feats of horsemanship, and she had never found anything to say against the tights and the very airy draperies worn by most of the equestrians.

The men who had apartments in Georgette's

house were not at all of the same opinion as the ladies. They, on the contrary, found the young girl very attractive, very well made, and they were strong in praise of the grace with which she wore her modest toilet. The little black skirt was thought charming from the first story to the top floor, and the neighbors said among themselves,—

"Have you seen the young girl in the little short skirt? the one who lives in the entresol?'

"Yes, she is very taking, is that damsel; she has a neat waist and a very well-developed figure. She reminds me of the famous Spanish dancer, Camera Petra."

"Yes, yes, it's the way her skirt hangs. I've seen her in the court, getting water from the pump."

"And always in the same simple dress."

"Yes, always. Oh, gentlemen, if you had but seen her pump! How graceful she was, as her skirt fluttered with every movement she made. I don't wonder they rave over her."

"She has, moreover, a very pretty leg and a tiny foot."

"She's a very pleasing young girl!"

"I must try to make her acquaintance."

"And I also."

"And I too."

"And I," said the photographer to himself, "I shall quickly make it, because I shall offer to

take the little neighbor's portrait on a card, and all young girls are pleased to have their portraits taken."

There was one gentleman there who made no remark; certainly he was too important a person to chat with his neighbors. This was the one who lived in the apartment on the first floor on the opposite side. This person was called M. de Mardeille; was he noble[1] or was he not? That matters little to us; one thing is certain, and that is that he had somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty-five thousand francs' income, of which he never spent the whole amount in any one year.

M. de Mardeille was then fifty years of age, but did not appear more than forty-five; he had been a very handsome young man and was still quite good-looking. He had been fortunate in that his figure had not increased duly with his age, and he could still find favor in the eyes of the fair sex; for to his physical advantages he knew how to join those which his money gave him. Always irreproachably dressed, for he did not adopt those fashions which are allowable to a young man but ridiculous at a certain age, M. de Mardeille had a distinguished bearing and the manners of the great world; in fact, although by no means a genius, he had that social wit which is often only the result of a good memory, but which is infinitely more common than natural wit. To all this he added

[1] The de is used by many who are not noble, and so have no right to it.

not a little presumption, and the belief that he was very subtle and keen.

It is almost superfluous to say that this gentleman took the best possible care of his health; for he considered it quite essential to maintain his good looks and to remain as young as possible, which is a very difficult thing to do as age creeps upon us day by day. But then, if one looks young one can try to persuade one's self that one is really so, though, in truth, there is always something in our inner consciousness that makes us remember how old we are; but since that something does not disclose itself we have the right to forget it.

M. de Mardeille, then, took great care of his person; he took baths twice a week, he took laxatives to preserve his fresh complexion, he never went to excess either in eating or drinking. In fact, he was a man who thought only of himself; he had never known what it was to feel a pang of sorrow or regret for a woman, for egotists are not amorous. It was, besides, this gentleman's boast that he had never spent his money on a woman. One does not call it spending money when one takes a lady to dine at a restaurant, or to the theatre, or to drive in the Bois-de-Boulogne; for then, as one shares in the pleasure one's self and at the same time satisfies his vanity in parading his conquest before the eyes of men, the one who pays the money always gets something in return for it. So M. de Mardeille, who up to the present had

found a way to the ladies' favor without its costing anything, laughed at his friends, the greater part of whom ruined themselves or got into debt to satisfy the caprices of the ladies they languished for. Then he would look in the glass as he said,—

"Why the devil don't you do as I do? Never was known the woman who could resist me, and yet I never offer them cashmere shawls or diamonds, still less money. Fie, for shame! And I'm careful not to pay any of their milliner's bills; when one of my dear friends sends some one of her tradespeople to me, one who has a little bill against her, begging me to help her out of her embarrassment by paying it for her, I begin by shutting my door in the tradesman's face; then I cease to visit my fair friend, to whom I write: 'As I find it impossible to oblige you, I dare no longer come to see you.' Then she comes running after me and overwhelms me with marks of affection, as she exclaims: 'So you thought that my love was a matter of interest! It is not so, I love you for yourself alone. Come back to me! come back!' I turn a deaf ear to her for a while, and then I return and there are transports of love. You may be certain of this, gentlemen, that a man isn't loved better for being very gallant and very generous. They are more careful to deceive him — that's all, because they have a desire for his presents and his gifts of money; but what pleasure

is there in having a woman who only loves you for what she can obtain from you?"

"But," answered one of his friends, "you have never known the pleasure of giving, then? You don't know what a charm there is in satisfying a woman's desires, in yielding to her whims and fancies; nor with what a sweet smile she thanks you, whether you bring her a pretty trifle or a rich ornament."

"Hang it! I should think she ought to smile on you on such an occasion; you wouldn't have her make a grimace, would you? But that gracious smile which delights you and charms you is not for you; it is for the jewel or cashmere shawl which you brought her. You thought perhaps that she loved you the better for it. Why, not a bit of it; she would be as ready to deceive you the moment after and make game of you with the friend of her heart, to whom she would laughingly show the present you had just made her. No, messieurs, no; I do not know, nor do I wish to know, what you term the pleasure of giving. For this pleasure would deprive me of all confidence in my mistress; and if I am deceived in her, I can have the satisfaction of saying that the deception was not costly. After all," resumed De Mardeille, "I must confess that I have usually chosen my flames from society, and that in consequence the ladies did not need that I should show myself generous towards them."

"That doesn't prove anything. No matter in what position a woman be placed, she is always flattered at receiving a rich present."

"That is possible; but I feel more greatly flattered when she loves me without my making any."

You know this gentleman now, who lived exactly opposite Georgette, and whose windows, situated on the first floor, permitted him to look down upon the person who occupied the entresol opposite; that entresol being occupied by the little shirtmaker, who, as we have already had the pleasure of telling you, often left her windows open to enjoy the mild spring air and perhaps also to look at her neighbors. When a woman is pretty she does not hide unless she is dominated by a jealous person, and even then she finds a way to show enough of herself to make the beholder desirous of seeing more of her.

M. de Mardeille deigned sometimes to place himself at a window of the dining-room which looked into the court, from whence, enveloped in a very fine dressing gown of velvet or padded cashmere, according to the season, his head covered with an elegant fez, of which the drooping tassel fell gracefully over his left ear, while from under his cap escaped some curly brown hair which he had taken means to prevent from turning white, the gentleman glanced languidly sometimes at those of his neighbors who were worth the

trouble of looking at; but up to this time he had seen nothing in the house which deserved more than passing notice — a mere momentary glance.

When Georgette had first moved in M. de Mardeille's servant had hastened to be the first to tell his master that he had a new neighbor opposite him, adding,—

"She seemed very pleasing to me."

"Oh, she seemed pleasing to you?" answered the gentleman, smiling. "And what sort of a woman is this new tenant?"

"Monsieur, she's a single woman, so it seems, who makes men's shirts."

"A shirtmaker! and you dare to brag about that to me, Frontin?"

M. de Mardeille wished his valet to allow himself to be called Frontin, although his real name was Eustache; but this name of Frontin, which was formerly employed in all the comic operas, recalled to the elegant and seductive De Mardeille a quantity of intrigues, spicy, gallant, diverting, in which Frontin's master was always the victor; and it was probably to reproduce in the world these scenes of the theatre that M. de Mardeille had renamed his man thus; had he dared, he would have called him Figaro, but he was beginning to be rather old to pose as an Almaviva.

Frontin, who was a great booby and thought himself very knowing, smiled as he answered his master,—

"Faith, monsieur, what of that? what if she is only a shirtmaker? I should have thought a pretty girl was always a pretty girl."

"There's some truth in what you say there, Frontin; but as far as I am concerned, you must understand that I look at women with eyes different from yours; that is to say, in order to appear pretty to me it is necessary that a young girl — a grisette even, for I don't absolutely discriminate against grisettes — it is essential, I repeat, that she possess something else besides ordinary beauty which charms you immediately — you others, that is. She must have a — well, I hardly know how to express it; but a certain peculiar charm which we connoisseurs immediately notice, but which the common run of people do not perceive. Let's see, Frontin, what you have noticed as particularly attractive in this young girl? I shall see at once if you recognize the manner of which I speak."

"You want to know what I've noticed, monsieur?"

"Yes. First of all, where have you seen this young girl?"

"Monsieur, I saw her pass this morning; she was crossing the court as I was in the porter's lodge, and he said to me: 'Look! there's our new tenant of the little entresol. That's Mamzelle Georgette, and they say she sews like a fairy!' Naturally, I looked at her and saw a young girl, twenty years old perhaps, who had a very good

figure and most pleasing eyes, very prepossessing; eyes which you — which — "

"Enough, Frontin, I understand what you mean. And what else?"

"What else, monsieur? Mercy! she has a rather snub nose, a well-formed mouth. I saw her teeth when she spoke to the porter, and not one was lacking, monsieur."

"Confound it, if she had gaps in her teeth at twenty, that would be very unfortunate."

"But I meant to say that her teeth are very white, very even — and then her cheeks are so rosy, so fresh!"

"I understand, a beauty of the fields, a rustic; she's probably come from the country."

"No, she doesn't look at all like a peasant — her carriage is too easy for that."

"Well, I shall see her, I shall examine her. I'll cast my eye over her; but I will wager — a toothpick, that this pretty neighbor is but a very commonplace beauty. Does she sit by her window sometimes?"

"Better still, monsieur, she leaves her windows quite wide open, and from here one can look down into her rooms; one can see as far as to the bed in the back of the room."

"Oh, one can see up to her bed, eh? and she leaves her windows open?"

"I presume she closes them when she goes to bed; and she has curtains."

"You rascally Frontin, so you've noticed all that, have you? and so she has curtains! confound it! it would be a pretty thing if she hadn't any. Why, the proprieties would be outraged, Frontin, outraged. Well, I wish very much to see this young girl who seems so pleasing to you, that I may see if you are right."

"I'll bet you'll say the same as I do, monsieur."

Some moments afterwards, Frontin came running to his master and said to him,—

"Monsieur, our young neighbor's windows are wide open, and she is working beside one of them; so you can see her when you please."

M. de Mardeille rose, saying,—

"Well, Frontin, you're devilishly insistent that I shall see your little shirtmaker. But beware! if you've disturbed me for some commonplace little thing you'll deprive me of all confidence in your taste."

Although he gave himself the appearance of going to look at his young neighbor only in compliance with Frontin's desires, he was not sorry to have an opportunity of proving whether she was as good-looking as his servant had declared her to be. M. de Mardeille had always been a great admirer of the fair sex, seeking to please the women had been almost the sole occupation of his life, and for the past few years this occupation had proved very laborious and had taken more

of his time and pains. One must be handsome not to appear more than forty-five at the age of fifty, and there are ladies who think the former too old, and ordinarily they are the ones who are the same age themselves. A middle-aged man finds it much easier to win the heart of a young girl than that of a woman who has lived; wherefore? Why, probably because the one has had more experience than the other.

M. de Mardeille went, therefore, and placed himself at one of his dining-room windows; he assumed a very graceful pose as he leaned on his window-sill; he lightly pushed his fez over his right ear, then he looked up and down the court, as if he was unwilling to allow it to be seen that he had come there to gaze at the new tenant of the entresol.

Presently, however, he negligently glanced in her direction. Georgette was seated beside the window, she was sewing, and from time to time she also looked into the court; it is quite defensible that a young girl should wish to know her neighbors' faces.

M. de Mardeille could thus scan the shirt-maker's features at his ease; and she in turn, when she looked up from her work, could see that her neighbor across the way was watching her; but that did not seem to embarrass her in the least, for it did not prevent her from often raising her head to look out of the window.

"Not bad, not at all bad," muttered M. de Mardeille; "a little snub nose, a fresh complexion, eyes which seem lively enough and rather saucy, but nothing extraordinary; I've seen her like a hundred times over. She's a pleasing young girl, but nothing more; she certainly does not deserve all the eulogies you have showered upon her, my good Frontin."

But Georgette was then seated and this gentleman could not see how slender was her waist, how graceful her carriage. Happily, chance willed — but was it really chance? We would not swear that it was; women divine so easily what will charm us. No matter, put it down that chance gave this young girl the idea of getting up to water a little pot of violets which was placed in her other window.

Then her neighbor opposite could see her coming and going in her room, for one does not at first find all one needs to water flowers, above all when one has no watering-pot. So he saw Mademoiselle Georgette in her dressing-jacket and her little short skirt, he even saw her foot and ankle, for the young girl, always by chance of course, went several times to the back of her room and continued to move about after watering her plants; and M. de Mardeille, who had been disposed to leave his window, stayed there in motionless admiration.

"Why, she's devilishly pretty, is this little one; confound it, what a waist! what a figure! what a

foot! what a leg! Why, she's infinitely better looking than any one I've ever seen. What a dashing walk too. She reminds me of Béranger's song,—

Ma Fretillon! Ma Fretillon!
Cette fille
Qui fretille
N'a pourtant qu'un cotillon!"

Astonished at hearing his master sing, Frontin said to him with a piteous expression,—

"So monsieur doesn't think that the little girl opposite deserves the praises I bestowed upon her?"

M. de Mardeille answered, without leaving his casement and without ceasing to look towards his neighbor's,—

"Chut! chut! do be quiet, Frontin; I know I said that, but then I had not seen her delicate, supple waist, that little black skirt which sets off her graceful form, both of which are charming and well worthy of my admiration; and her foot, she has a charming foot and ankle."

"Oh, I'm glad monsieur sees I was right, and —"

"Be quiet, Frontin, be quiet! She's looking over here!"

In fact, Georgette had raised her head, and her eyes had met those of her neighbor on the first floor opposite. M. de Mardeille hastened to bow graciously to his new neighbor, and she replied by

an inclination of the head and a very amiable smile.

M. de Mardeille then left his window, saying,—

"We won't lavish our attentions too suddenly. But after the way in which this little girl smiled at me, I see I shan't have much trouble in making a conquest of her."

CHAPTER V

The Little Black Skirt Does Its Part. A Box of Candied Fruit

It would have been quite out of accordance with M. de Mardeille's character, and contrary to his usual habit of thought, had he not felt assured that he could add Mademoiselle Georgette to the list of his conquests; but, meanwhile, all the other male tenants of the house tried to find favor in her sight. The fluttering of Georgette's little skirt had turned all these gentlemen's heads.

The young literary men burned the midnight oil to make verses in her honor, to celebrate her charming figure in a song. They were desirous of singing Georgette as Béranger sang Lisette, as all amorous poets have sought to immortalize their mistress and their love. Each of these young fellows believed himself a Virgil, a Catullus, a Tibullus, a Petrarch. There was no harm in this; vanity is credulous and is one of the most common traits in human nature, and in valuing one's self one might as well believe one's self to be a somebody as a nobody; it gives one an immense amount of harmless satisfaction at a very small cost.

The miniature painter was extremely anxious to get the young girl to let him paint her portrait; and the photographer hoped she would allow him to photograph her, both full figure and half length and in any quantity of poses.

The young medical man wished her for a patient, and actually entreated Providence to send his little neighbor a slight indisposition which would oblige her to have recourse to his skill.

The married man, who was so ugly himself and who had such a pretty wife, naturally found the little shirtmaker much better-looking than his spouse. As this gentleman lived above M. de Mardeille, he also had a good view of Georgette's apartments. He placed himself very often at his dining-room window, and from that post of vantage, not content with merely gazing at his neighbor, he also made signs to her and threw her kisses in a very compromising way for a married man. But, then, he knew that his wife was not at all jealous, and that she took very little notice of what he did.

In fact, this fever extended even to the bachelor clerk who had a maid-of-all-work, and who allowed himself, despite the fact that he was considerably over fifty, to make eyes at the pleasing shirtmaker; and as he had no window which faced hers, he was sometimes obliged to lean right out of the window in order to get a glimpse of her. Then the maid-of-all-work would scream to him,—

"Good heavens, monsieur, it's not common-sense to hang out of the window like that! What do you want to look at now? Is it for that little shirtmaker in the entresol that you're willing to throw yourself out of the window? Why, really, the hussy isn't worth the trouble. There's nothing so very marvellous about her; and you'll have given yourself a crick in the neck for nothing, monsieur, for she never so much as looks this way."

Then the old bachelor, extremely angry, but desirous of keeping on good terms with his maid, answered her,—

"Arthémise, you don't know what you are talking about; I'm not looking at anything in particular; I don't glance more to one side than to the other. I merely came to the window because it does me good to get the air, to breathe it freely. I don't busy myself with my neighbors, and did not even know that there was a shirtmaker in the entresol."

"Yes, yes, you may tell that to others," muttered Mademoiselle Arthémise, "you won't catch me like that. Why, all the men in the house are cracked over that young thing; it's easy to see that, for they pass all their time now at their windows."

And, in fact, whenever Georgette had her window open and sat at work beside it one could see a man's head appear almost immediately at the

fourth floor window, then one at the second floor, and so on; sometimes all these gentlemen appeared at the same time, which seemed to give Georgette much amusement, as she demurely responded by a slight movement of her head to the bows which were accorded her from all the stories of the house.

The feminine sex was outraged at the conduct of these gentlemen, for up to that time not one of them had shown himself so anxious to see one of the beauties of the house; it is true there were none in it except the ugly gentleman's wife, and she never appeared at one of the windows which gave on the court. Her bedroom looked on to the boulevard, and the lady believed that she would compromise her dignity by looking out on to the court.

On the other hand, her husband was one of Georgette's most intrepid admirers; one who wished to see her oftenest, and had instituted a system of telegraphic movements to which the shirtmaker did not respond. That did not discourage M. Bistelle, for that was the gentleman's name; he continued to waft kisses to the young girl — who pretended not to see them — to the scandalization of all the other neighbors.

The young staymakers amused themselves at M. Bistelle's expense, and pointed their fingers at him as soon as he appeared at the window. Madame Picotee, the lady who had the secret

beauty spot, would place herself at her window directly her neighbor appeared at his; then she gave way to great shouts of laughter, rather forced, it is true; and every time M. Bistelle wafted a kiss to Georgette she exclaimed,—

"Good heavens! how stupid some men are! but I've never yet seen one so utterly stupid as that one over there. And a married man, too! It's frightful! They ought to rebuild the Bastile expressly for such as he."

M. Bistelle heard all this; but it made no manner of difference to him, and he often muttered to himself,—

"Why, if I had cared to kiss my hand to her, she would have been delighted, she wouldn't have thought it so frightful then."

M. de Mardeille was careful not to act so foolishly as his neighbor of the second floor. He placed himself beside his window to look at Georgette; but, so far from making signs to her and sending her kisses, he contented himself with bowing gravely, and the young girl never failed to respond with a gracious smile.

But as neighbor Bistelle was often at his window just at the moment when Georgette smiled so sweetly as she gently inclined her head to M. de Mardeille, he took to himself what was intended for the occupant of the story beneath him; his hope fed on it, he was delighted, he rubbed his hands, and sometimes came down to walk in the court;

then he would stop under the shirtmaker's windows, humming,—

It is here that Rose doth dwell,

or better still,

When one knows how to love and please,
Needs one any other fortune?

And the staymaker's little apprentices never failed to clap their hands and ask him to do it over again. Madame Picotee one day threw him two sous, which he picked up laughing and put in his pocket, remarking,—

"They'll do to buy me some rouge and some rice powder."

This made the lady of the beauty spot furiously angry, and she ran to get her water jug, and would have thrown its contents over him had she not been stopped by the presence of the porter, who was sweeping the court.

However, Frontin, who saw very well that his master was in love with the young girl of the entresol, informed him of everything that went on in the house, and told him of all the follies which M. Bistelle committed to try to make himself agreeable to Mademoiselle Georgette.

"What! does the ugly fellow hope to win the regard of that pretty grisette?" exclaimed M. de Mardeille. "Why, doesn't he ever look in the glass?"

"I don't know if the gentleman knows how

frightful he is, but I know he flatters himself that he is pleasing to Mademoiselle Georgette. He asserts that she smiles so charmingly only when he is at the window."

"Smiles at him? Why, the young girl smiles at me, not at him. It's impossible that she can be smiling at him. The fool! the monkey! For he's very like a monkey, isn't he Frontin?"

"Yes, monsieur, in looks and in gestures."

"What, does he scratch his head as the monkeys do?"

"My faith, monsieur, he's always making such a strange pantomime that it looks like it. But that is not all."

"What else, Frontin?"

"Well, I happen to know that he sent a very fine bouquet to Mademoiselle Georgette."

"A bouquet! what a fatuous fellow! and he dares? — and this bouquet, did she accept it?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur, it is on her window-sill now."

"Can it be possible? Let us see if that is so."

M. de Mardeille hastened to look out at the shirtmaker's windows; he not only perceived a big bouquet lying on the window-sill, but what was still more distasteful to him, he saw M. Bistelle walking in the court, and humming,—

If with her I cannot be,
My bouquet will plead for me.

"Come, come, decidedly I must do something,"

said the well-preserved beau to himself; "I must do something more than show myself at the window. I can't, however, go in broad daylight to this shirtmaker's, that will compromise me. Oh, I have an idea, a pretext already made. Frontin, listen to me for a minute."

"Here I am, monsieur."

"I want you to go at once to Mademoiselle Georgette's —"

"To the pretty neighbor's?"

"Yes; you will go to her very politely, as coming from me. You will tell her that knowing that she is a shirtmaker and requiring some very fine shirts — that's not true, I need none, but to keep up appearances I can order a dozen — you will, I say, tell her that having this work to give her I beg that she will kindly take the trouble to come up to my apartments. You understand; in this way I shall not compromise myself, and I shall be better able to talk to her here than if I went to her house."

"Yes, monsieur, yes; I'll do your commission."

"Be very polite, very respectful; that flatters these young girls."

"Yes, monsieur; and don't you want me to take her a bouquet like that?"

"What nonsense! of what use are bouquets? there is nothing so commonplace. Do you think I wish to resemble M. Bistelle? No, no; noth-

ing of the sort; I have no need of bouquets to assure my success. Go, Frontin; if the young shirtmaker asks at what hour I can receive her, tell her that I leave her entirely free to choose the hour that is most convenient to herself, and that she will be welcome at any time! I hope that's gallant enough, eh? that's worth more than a bouquet."

Frontin went out to execute the commission with which his master had charged him. But the bouquet sent to Georgette by M. Bistelle had been seen by the whole house. Immediately, as though he had put the match to a train of powder, all the aspirants to the young girl's favor said to themselves that they must not be left behind in the race and that the moment had come for them to try to make her acquaintance.

The young scribe whose aspiration it was to be a poet made her a present of a little bunch of violets worth two sous — one is gallant according to his means; but the bouquet was wrapped in a white paper, on which was written this quatrain,—

I saw you pumping, pretty maid,
Devoid of guile, you charm because you're true;
Your movements are so full of grace,
A man would damn himself to pump with you.

The young poet charged the porter to carry his flowers and his verses to the entresol, and requested him to say to the young girl that she must read what was on the paper. A little later the poet's

confrère came with a modest bouquet; but he was a writer of vaudeville rather than a poet, and it was a song that he sent with his flowers. He gave the same instructions to the porter as the one who had preceded him.

Then followed the photographer, who sent a package of photographs of the actors most in repute. Generally, as every one knows, young workwomen have a very pronounced liking for actors, and our photographer did not doubt but that his present would be very agreeable, and charged the porter to say to Mademoiselle Georgette that he would be greatly flattered if she would allow him to photograph her.

Next came the miniature painter, who sent a pretty cardboard box on which he had painted a group of little cupids in very graceful attitudes. In giving his box to the porter the painter said,—

"Do not fail to assure Mademoiselle Georgette that the painter, the author of all these cupids, will esteem himself very fortunate if he may paint his neighbor's portrait, gratis, and in any costume she chooses."

Some moments after the miniature painter, the young doctor also appeared, and put into the porter's hands a package done up in paper, with these instructions,—

"Be kind enough to carry that to Mademoiselle Georgette, from me; it is linden, mallow, and wild poppy, all of which are excellent for a cold,

and one rarely passes an entire year without at least one cold. You will say to this young lady that I desire permission to care for her should she be ill."

Finally, the old bachelor had purchased a box of candied fruits — not through the instrumentality of his maid, we may be sure — and he was careful not to entrust his commission to the porter lest Arthémise should hear of it. He found a little bootblack on the boulevard, and gave him the box, explaining to him where he must carry it; and as he did not wish to remain incognito, for fear his pretty neighbor should attribute his present to another, he charged his messenger to say to the damsel,—

"M. Renardin, your neighbor, sends you this box with his compliments," adding, "Above all, don't stop at the porter's; don't speak to him; go straight to Mademoiselle Georgette's in the entresol. I have paid you; don't take anything from her."

Matters had reached this point when M. de Mardeille sent Frontin to Georgette's. From the first thing in the morning the porter had not ceased to trot between his lodge and the entresol, carrying the presents which had been brought him by one and another. The young shirtmaker accepted everything without making any ado about it; contentedly remarking to the porter on each occasion,—

"Tell the gentleman I thank him."

"Mademoiselle, don't forget to read the verses — there are verses on the paper —" cried the porter, putting the violets into her hand.

"That's all right. I shall read them, but I shall send no answer to anything."

Georgette had read the poet's quatrain and feeling in the humor she now hummed the vaudevillist's verse, which was set to the tune of la Boulangère, laughing heartily as she sang,—

You have a roguish little face,
Your waist is round and slim;
A killing eye, a saucy grace,
A foot and ankle trim;
And 'neath your dainty skirt I trace
A perfect moulded limb;
I vow,
A perfect moulded limb.

Then the porter re-appeared bearing the packet of actors' photographs, and the instant after with the pretty box on which the Loves were painted,

"What more?" cried Georgette. "Why, these gentleman must have agreed among themselves to shower all these attentions upon me to-day."

"My faith, yes, mademoiselle; they're making a line at my lodge, but I don't complain of that; for the matter of that, these young men all mean well, they only want to present their compliments; that's what they told me to say to you."

"I'll accept their little presents, because that keeps up friendly feelings; but I want you to tell

these gentlemen that I will not accept their homage, and that they need not trouble themselves to come here to offer it."

The porter departed, saying to himself,—

"Devil take it! it seems the young girl is virtuous, and these gentleman will gain nothing by their presents. But in spite of that, she accepts everything."

Later on, Georgette received the little packet of herbs sent by the doctor and was giving the usual answer to the porter when M. de Mardeille's valet presented himself at her door.

Frontin bowed to the young girl with the air which persons of his class assume when they think one is much pleased to see them; and when Georgette asked him what he wanted, he answered almost patronizingly,—

"Mademoiselle, I am here on behalf of my master, M. de Mardeille, the gentleman who lives there — opposite you, on the first story, in a three-thousand-franc apartment; he could have a carriage if he wished, he has the means for it; and if he hasn't got it, it's because he doesn't want it."

"That indeed! what next? what does it matter to me that your master has the means to keep a carriage and that his apartment costs him three thousand francs? Did he send you here to tell me that? That would be silly indeed."

Frontin was a little disconcerted at not having

produced more effect; he resumed in a humbler tone,—

"No, mademoiselle, no, my master did not send me to tell you that. But I thought, I believed you would be pleased to have the information; one likes to know with whom one has to deal."

"Say what you have been commissioned to say, that will be much better than making so much talk."

This time Frontin was altogether disconcerted; he had expected to find the young workwoman only too happy to receive a message from his master, and he saw that he had to do with a young girl who appeared to be making game of him. He therefore decided to be very polite and said in a respectful tone,—

"Mademoiselle, my master has some shirts to be made and, knowing that you work at that trade, he begs that you will kindly come to the house to take his order and measure him."

"Monsieur," answered Georgette, in a very decided tone, "you will tell your master that it is not my custom to go to bachelors' houses. If this gentleman were married, if he had a wife in his house, I would readily accept his invitation; there would be no difficulty about doing that, but as he is alone—"

"Mademoiselle, he has a housekeeper and me."

"Domestics don't count. I will not go to your master's house; if he has any orders to give

me he must take the trouble to come to me, and I will receive him — him and his twenty-five-thousand-francs income, with or without a carriage."

Frontin was vexed, first, because the young girl had said that servants did not count; and, second, because she seemed to make light of his master's high position. He answered with a mortified air,—

"Why, mademoiselle, where would be the harm, even if you should come to M. de Mardeille's; you will not be the first. He has visits from ladies, a good many ladies — and real ladies, as I can certify, who don't work for a living."

"Monsieur le valet, you are a stupid. You say nothing but what is stupid."

"What, I'm a stupid, am I? Let me tell you —"

"I have no doubt that your master receives a good many ladies, and it is precisely for that reason that I do not wish to augment the number."

"Why, then —"

"That's enough; you have my answer, go and give it to your master."

Frontin was inclined still to argue the matter, when a great noise in the court drew the attention of all the tenants of the house.

We must remember that Georgette's neighbor, M. Renardin, who kept the maid-of-all-work, had purchased a box of candied fruits and had given them to a little shoeblack to carry to Georgette, carefully pointing out to him that she lodged in the

entresol at the end of the court. But the young lad, who accumulated commissions as he blacked his customers' boots, was a son of Auvergne, and had only sufficient intelligence to black boots or to carry a couple of buckets of water, for the water-bearers are almost all Auvergnats. The little messenger put the box of candy, which was carefully wrapped in white paper and tied with pink ribbon, under his arm. He went with it into the house pointed out to him and, passing defiantly by the porter's lodge, he was about to cross the court when the porter, who had seen the boy pass, issued from his lodge and ran after him and, stopping him in the court, said to him,—

"And where are you going in such a great rush, you little rascal? How dare you come into the court and pass my lodge without saying a word to me? Nobody can come into the house like this —do you hear me, Savoyard?"

"I ain't no Savoyard! I'm an Auvergnat."

"Savoyard or Auvergnat, it's all the same to me; it's exactly the same thing. Where are you going?"

"I didn't speak to you. I'm going about my business."

"You didn't speak to me, I know that well; but I am speaking to you. I'm the porter, I've the right to question you, and you must answer me."

"I'm not to speak to the porter; that's what he ordered me. I'm going straight in."

"You stubborn little street-arab, I tell you that you shan't pass till I know where you are going."

"Then, I tell you I'm going straight in to take this box."

"Where are you going to take it to?"

"I'm not talking to you."

"But I'll make you talk to me. And what's in this box? — deadly explosives, perhaps. If you won't answer me, I'll take you before the commissioner of police."

The porter seized the small boy by the arm; the urchin struggled, wept, and shouted at the top of his voice,—

"Let me go, will yer, you big tief! I'm doing an errand for your neighbor, M. Renardin, and I'll go and tell him you won't let me do it."

Mademoiselle Arthémise, the old bachelor's maid, was crossing the court just at this moment; when she heard her master's name mentioned she stopped, and then came swiftly towards the messenger, saying, —

"M. Renardin, who is asking for M. Renardin? is it this little boy? What is it you want with him?"

"Why, no, he says he comes from him," cried the porter. "Why didn't he say so at first, the little idiot, then I should have let him pass."

"From M. Renardin, he comes from him? In that case, he must be looking for me. M. Renardin must have sent him to me. What do you want with me, my little fellow?"

The young Auvergnat looked at Mademoiselle Arthémise, who was a stout, buxom woman of thirty, with a high color and with down all over her lip and chin, which made her look like a man disguised as a woman.

"Are you Mademoisella Georgetta?" he asked her.

"Mademoiselle Georgette," answered the maid, rolling her eyes furiously, "yes, yes, that's me."

"And do you live in the entresola, there, opposita?"

"Yes, yes; I tell you, that's me — and M. Renardin sent you to fetch this box to Mademoiselle Georgette at the entresol?"

"Yes, it is from your neighbor with his very best compliments, mademoisella."

"Ah, now we shall see what he's sent to this mincing little puss."

Mademoiselle Arthémise had seized the box, and was already tearing the paper off it, when the porter exclaimed,—

"Why, what are you doing? you're taking that box, and you know very well it doesn't belong to you."

"What's that to do with you? What are you meddling for, you miserable porter? Has the little shirtmaker paid you to look after the presents her lovers send?"

"No, mademoiselle, the shirtmaker hasn't paid me; but I must do my duty. If this Savoyard

of an Auvergnat had explained, I should have let him pass to take Mademoiselle Georgette what he was carrying to her."

"Yes, yes; of course, you protect the gallants, that's your business, that's what you're here for."

"My business is to see that the tenants receive what is addressed to them; so you may give me that box, for it doesn't belong to you."

"Catch me at it! candied fruits, apricots, orange, do you see that now? He makes a present of candies like that to that creature, and thinks I needn't put mushrooms in fricasseed fowl, thinks I spend too much money, that I'm not economical. Wait a bit, just you wait a bit! I'll give it to you, with your candied plums and your cherries threaded on straws."

"Once more, Mademoiselle Arthémise, give me that box — you are not Mamzelle Georgette."

The little Auvergnat, who only now began to see his blunder, cried,—

"What! aren't you the young lady of the entresola?"

"It's all right, hold your tongue, you little brat; who's going to notice you. Wait, there's a bit of orange; swallow that, and get out of this."

And Mademoiselle Arthémise thrust a piece of candied orange into the bootblack's mouth. The latter received the fruit and ate it; nevertheless, he wished to get the box into his possession again, and tried with all his might to take it from

M. Renardin's maid; the porter seconded the little messenger's efforts. But the stout Arthémise was a bold, determined hussy, who would have had the strength to struggle with much rougher antagonists than these. She began operations by throwing a piece of quince paste into the little bootblack's face; then seizing a candied apricot, she rammed it into the porter's left eye, who, dismayed by the suddenness of the attack, bellowed that she had blinded him; she followed this up with slaps right and left which she distributed impartially between the pair of them.

The shouts of the porter, the howls of the little Auvergnat, together with Mademoiselle Arthémise's shrieks of laughter, attracted all the tenants to their windows. To increase the scandal, M. Renardin returned home just at this moment; he had been uneasy because his little messenger had failed to return, and he was curious to learn how the little shirtmaker had received his toothsome present.

The precise and timid old bachelor became livid and motionless with fright when he saw the little Auvergnat on all fours in the court, looking for the piece of quince paste; and the porter, who was picking out by morsels the apricot which was glued to his left eye; and his buxom, Amazonian hand-maiden who was roaring with laughter and stuffing herself with choice candied fruits as she said,—

"They're mighty good, all the same. I don't know exactly what this piece is, but I'll make myself a present of it."

"What does this mean, Arthémise? What are you doing in the court instead of attending to your dinner?" said M. Renardin, frowning.

"My dinner; oh, well, that may get along as it can. I'm having a feast, I am. I'm eating candied pears and oranges. Oh, monsieur, when you set out to do it, you make fine presents to the young ladies. But next time you must choose a page who isn't so stupid as that one; he mistook me for that finical miss in the entresol. Mercy! I let him do it. I accepted the box."

"What, you clown! is that the way you execute the commissions with which you are charged?"

"No, monsieur, it wasn't my — my fault; the porter wouldn't let me go in."

"I did my duty; this Savoyard is an idiot, and I was going to send him to the entresol when Mademoiselle Arthémise told him that she was Mademoiselle Georgette, and that the box was for her."

"What, Arthémise, you allowed yourself to—"

"Come, what have I done to make such a to-do about. This urchin brought a box from you, and of course I thought it was for me. How was I going to imagine that a man of your age was still going a-courting young girls? that you were going to spend your money on the first little irregular

face that comes to set itself up in the house? that you would send boxes of sweetmeats to a newcomer, a shirtmaker? while you grumble every day because you say I put a bit too much butter in a sauce — how —"

"That will do, mademoiselle, that is enough; follow me and we will have an explanation upstairs. I don't care for the whole house to know what takes place in my dwelling."

And M. Renardin quickly took his way up the staircase without daring to raise his eyes to the windows of the entresol. Mademoiselle Arthémise followed her master, making horns behind him; she still held the box of candied fruit under her arm and exclaimed as she laughed in the porter's face,—

"I snap my fingers at all of you! I always have good things, and as to monsieur, if he doesn't like porridge he'd better be quiet, or I won't give him anything else to eat for a week."

"Mademoiselle," said the porter, "if my eye is bad, you'll have to pay the doctor."

"Make the best of it, dear friend. You must apply to M. Renardin; he's at the bottom of all this. He's an old flirt, and nothing else."

Georgette had heard all the foregoing from her window and had been much diverted thereby. M. Frontin, who was then on the stairway, had paused on his way down in order not to lose a word of it, that he might report everything to his

master. When there was nobody left in the court, for the little Auvergnat had run off as soon as he had picked up the piece of quince paste, Frontin went into the building by the back way, and so to his master's apartments. There he was about to begin by relating all that had taken place in the court; but M. de Mardeille interrupted him.

"I know all that," said he. "I was at my window. I know that M. Renardin sent a box of dried fruits to the little shirtmaker, and that his maid Arthémise has seized the box and eaten its contents. That Arthémise acts in such a way that her master ought to send her off without notice. But when a man lets himself be ruled by his servant he well deserves that she should make game of him. But all that is of little interest to me; this M. Renardin is not a rival that I need trouble myself about. You've been to the little one's, eh? Well, she must have been flattered, delighted at my proposition. When is she coming?"

Frontin drew himself up and assumed a grave expression, as he answered,—

"Mademoiselle Georgette did not appear at all flattered by monsieur's proposition; on the contrary, she assumed a very high and mighty expression."

"Come, be as short as you can, Frontin."

"In fact, monsieur, this shirtmaker will not come to take your measure for those shirts; do you understand that?"

"I understand that you are an idiot, if that is the way you have done my commission. I never spoke to you about taking a measure."

"Monsieur, I thought that was necessary. When the tailor makes your trousers he always measures you first."

"Enough. And this young girl; what did she say? She did not refuse to give her reasons, did she?"

"Monsieur, she seemed astonished that you weren't married. She said, 'Oh, if your master were married, if he had a wife, that would be different. I would go immediately to take his measure; but I do not go to bachelors' houses. If he wishes to come to my house, I will receive him.'"

"Oh, she wants me to go to her place, does she? You should have told me that at first, simpleton. I understand. That will flatter the damsel's vanity. These girls have so much self-conceit. She wants all the house to know that M. de Mardeille is paying court to her. After all, what care I for all of them put together; I will go, but I will go in the evening, because then it will be dark and the neighbors will not be at their windows."

CHAPTER VI

A Declaration and a Refusal

On the evening of the day on which he had sent his valet Frontin with a message to Georgette M. de Mardeille left his own apartments just as the clock was striking eight.

The night was quite dark, and everything was quiet in the house, for its inmates had either gone out to their evening amusements or were snugly ensconced in the privacy of their own apartments. This gentleman therefore descended his staircase with the utmost precaution, treading as noiselessly as possible, passed the porter's lodge lightly, to avoid being seen by that functionary, hastily crossed the court and went up to the little entresol, in the windows of which he could see a light shining through the curtain.

"In this way," he muttered to himself, "no one will see me go to the little shirtmaker's, and she herself will probably prefer to receive my visit after dark, to save appearances."

By this time M. de Mardeille had reached Mademoiselle Georgette's door and had rapped lightly thereat; after a moment's pause a sweet voice answered,—

"Who is there?"

"Open the door, if you please, Mademoiselle Georgette; I should like to speak to you."

"I do not receive visitors in the evening; come again tomorrow morning."

"Mademoiselle, it is your neighbor over the way, M. de Mardeille — who sent his servant to you this morning. You know what brings me here, will you not admit me?"

"I'm very sorry, monsieur, but in the evening I do not open the door for anybody. Come again tomorrow, when it is light."

"What, mademoiselle, do you mean to say that you would leave me standing here at your door? Me, M. de Mardeille? You know very well who I am, and that I am not a thief."

"You are perhaps more dangerous than a thief. Good evening, monsieur; come tomorrow in the daytime.'

"It's because she's afraid I'll endanger her peace of mind that she refuses to admit me now," said M. de Mardeille, as he went back home.

This idea, which flattered his self-conceit, consoled him a little for his fruitless errand.

"Most assuredly she wishes the whole house to know that I am paying court to her. Well, mademoiselle, since you desire it, you shall have a visit from me in broad daylight."

In fact, the next day, after an hour spent in adorning himself, as he really wished to make him-

self as attractive as possible, M. de Mardeille determined to brave the curious looks of the neighbors. He came down and pretended to be going out, but in passing the porter's lodge said to the man,—

"Does not that young girl who lives in the entresol make shirts?"

"Yes, monsieur, she works for a haberdasher; she sews to perfection — or so they say."

"Well, then, I should like to order some shirts of her. One should always employ his neighbor when he can."

So our elegant gentleman turned on his heel, reached the court, and in an instant found himself before Georgette's door; the little shirtmaker, according to habit, had left her key outside the door during the daytime.

M. de Mardeille gave two little raps.

"Come in, the key is on the outside of the door,"[1] answered the same voice as had spoken to him the evening before.

The gentleman entered the young girl's abode with that ease which bespeaks a man of the world, and with that lack of ceremony which a rich man always permits himself when visiting poor people; at least, except when the aforesaid rich man has a certain good feeling and tact, when, so far from wishing to impress others by his superiority of

[1] In Parisian houses the doors are opened by turning the key; they are rarely provided with handle catches.

position, he rather seeks to make them forget it. But men of good feeling and tact are rare, and these two qualities were lacking in Georgette's neighbor.

However, that gentleman laid aside a part of his hauteur when he saw the ease with which the young girl received him. She did not seem at all put out by his visit, but offered him a seat very graciously, and without ceremony immediately resumed her own, which was beside the window.

"Permit me to ask, monsieur," said she, "what has procured me the honor of this visit."

M. de Mardeille sank languidly back in his chair, and answered smilingly,—

"Mademoiselle, I sent my valet yesterday to you, asking you to come to my house — not a very great distance off, for I live just opposite."

"I know it, monsieur; I place you perfectly. But your servant must have told you — "

"That you would not come to a bachelor's house — yes, he told me that. But, deuce take it! what is the reason that bachelors inspire you with this terror. You have some grudge against them, have you? Ha, ha, ha! Do you know that that might give rise to a great many suppositions."

And the gentleman laughed again, because he had fine teeth, which it pleased him to put in evidence, and also because he thought it very witty to laugh thus. But Georgette was impassivity itself, and answered coldly,—

"Monsieur, I cannot imagine what suppositions people might make; but I acted as I did because it suited me, and I care very little for what any one may think."

M. de Mardeille, quite surprised at the young girl's serious tone, laughed affectedly at first, and then decided not to laugh at all. He balanced himself back in his chair as he answered,—

"I had no intention of offending you. The deuce! it seems that one may not joke with you."

"Pardon me, monsieur, I am quite willing to joke with people whom I know."

"Oh, that's enough; and as yet you only know me by sight. As for me, mademoiselle, I am delighted to have so charming a neighbor as yourself living opposite to me, and it gave me an immediate desire to — to become intimately acquainted with you, in short."

"I thank you, monsieur, but there is too great a difference of position between us."

"The distance may be eliminated; that is to say, it may be very speedily overleaped when it is a question of a pretty woman and a man who is fascinated by her charms."

Georgette smiled.

"Was it to tell me that that you came here, monsieur?" she asked.

"Why, yes, it was. Listen to me, I don't take a roundabout way, I would much rather come straight to the point; and besides, why should I

hide the impression that your grace, your gentleness, have made on my heart? Is it a crime to love you? especially as I am a bachelor, and there is no reason why you should repulse my attentions. Yes, charming neighbor, you have completely turned my head; since I first saw you in the simple costume that becomes you so well I have not had a moment's peace, I think only of you. I made a pretext of needing some shirts to get you to come to my rooms; but what I really wanted — what I desired before everything — was to declare my love for you, and to entreat you not to be insensible to it."

It was now Georgette's turn to break into a peal of laughter; and she did it so frankly, so heartily, that the fine gentleman who was leaning towards her drew back and seemed quite put out. As the pretty shirtmaker continued to laugh, at length he said to her,—

"Confound it! mademoiselle, I am delighted to see you so gay; but will you not inform me as to the cause of your laughter? Surely, it cannot be the avowal of my sentiment which affords you amusement. You must be used to receiving like declarations; as far as I can see, all the men in the house have told you, or would like to tell you, the same."

"Oh, and how do you know that, monsieur?"

"Did I not see the porter pass the whole of yesterday in carrying you bouquets, photographs,

I know not what all? There was even talk of a box of candied fruit. Ha, ha, that episode was really too funny."

"Well, I must say all the gentlemen in the house have been very polite to me."

"Faith, mademoiselle, I don't care to send bouquets; I think that so common, so vulgar, that I don't care to imitate those gentlemen. I prefer to speak myself, to say frankly in words what I feel. Don't you think that is of more real value?"

"Why, it seems very nice to me to get bouquets, presents."

M. de Mardeille compressed his lips as he said to himself,—

"She likes little presents — she's not at all disinterested, which is very vexatious!"

This did not prevent his drawing his chair closer to Georgette, and trying to make his voice very tender, very touching, as he murmured,—

"But you have not responded to my declaration, dearest of girls."

"Excuse me, didn't you hear me laughing?"

"What, is that your way of answering? What am I to conclude from such a reply as that?"

"That I took your declaration at its true value; that is to say, as a huge joke."

"A joke, oh, don't imagine it for a moment! I meant what I said quite seriously, I love you! I adore you!"

"Were you taken that way all at once, because you saw me at my window?"

"Are weeks, months, necessary in order to fall in love? One sees a woman who is pleasing to one; one is attracted at once or not at all. Is not love electrical in its nature?"

"Oh, I don't know that—"

"Why, certainly it is; a pretty woman's eye contains a fluid that electrifies us of the other sex. From the moment we feel its influence we are undone, electrified!"

"Really, and are women affected in the same way? What electrifies them?"

"Why, the same thing, the looks we give them."

As he said this, the gentleman who wished to electrify the young girl fixed his eyes ardently upon her and again tried to draw his chair nearer to hers, but Georgette drew away her own, and said to him in a very dry tone,—

"Monsieur, do not come so near me, I beg of you, it embarrasses me at my work; and besides, it is not proper."

The fine gentleman was astounded, he thought that his eyes had not darted enough fire, and tried to make them still more inflammable in order to catch the tinder of her heart.

"Is it not allowable to approach you?" he said to her reproachfully, "to admire that divine figure nearer?"

"No, monsieur, it is distinctly not allowable;

and what would the neighbors think if they should see you beside me like that?"

"The neighbors! hang the neighbors! but why do you leave your windows wide open? It's very inconvenient to talk to you; if you'll allow me, I will go and close them."

"No, monsieur, no; on the contrary, I wish that they should remain open — they don't interfere with my talking at all; and if the neighbors know that you have come into my apartments —"

"What a singular idea to submit thus to the inspection of your neighbors, at whom you should laugh, after all."

"Oh, and don't you think that they too can laugh at other people?"

"I think — I think that you are very severe with me."

"And I, monsieur, think that I have done you a great favor in consenting to receive you in my apartment, where I have received no other man. You don't appear very grateful for it."

"Pardon me, my pretty neighbor, really I am very conscious of the honor you have done me — but I believed, I hoped. In truth, you haven't as yet told me if my sentiments are pleasing to you."

"Why, monsieur, I am hardly acquainted with you, and possibly I do not allow myself to be so easily electrified as do you."

"Mischief! you are playing with my torments."

"You say you love me, monsieur, but why should I believe in your love? What proofs of it have you given me?"

"What proofs? What, mademoiselle, are proofs necessary for you to believe in it?"

"Assuredly. Oh, I am very incredulous, and I never believe anything without proof."

"Why, mademoiselle, it seems to me that the step I have taken at this present moment ought to have proved to you already that I am telling you the truth. For a man of my rank, a man who moves only in the highest circles of society, to pay a visit to — a simple workwoman, he must necessarily be urged to it by a very ardent feeling."

"That is to say, monsieur, that you think you are conferring a great honor upon me in coming to see me?"

"Why no, I don't say that. Really, you are very malicious, you misconstrue every word I say."

Georgette did not answer; she continued to work. M. de Mardeille, greatly vexed at having made so much less progress than he had hoped to make in his wooing, said to himself,—

"Let's change the conversation a bit. This little girl ought to like pleasure — all women love to amuse themselves," and after a moment he resumed,—

"Have you been working for a long time thus — for a haberdasher?"

"Why, no, monsieur; in the first place, I haven't been in Paris very long."

"Ah, you are not a Parisian then? You surprise me, for you have all the grace of one; shall I be guilty of an indiscretion if I ask what part of the country you are from?"

Georgette hesitated a moment and then replied,—

"I come from a little village near Rouen."

"So you're a Norman? It's very singular that you have none of the accent. And how long have you been in Paris?"

"Nearly five months."

"And you came here alone?"

"Yes, all alone. I said to my parents, 'I want to go to Paris; I shall work there, and who knows, perhaps I shall make my fortune.'"

M. de Mardeille scratched his nose as he repeated,—

"Make a fortune! hum, that's a difficult thing to do. Women hardly make fortunes in Paris by means of their needles alone. But in coming to Paris you probably knew that you could find a friend — a rich protector, who could immediately put you in the way to realize that fortune for which you are ambitious?"

Georgette answered rather dryly,—

"No, monsieur, I did not come to find a protector in Paris; and I know very well myself how to arrive at the end I have in view."

The fine gentleman compressed his lips again and looked around the room,—

"One doesn't know," he mused, "what to be at with this little girl, she's so very sharp, so very much on her guard. The siege won't be as short as I had thought. But it matters little, I have time. I must find her weak spot."

"Mademoiselle, are you fond of the theatre?"

"Yes, indeed, monsieur, very fond."

"Do you go there often?"

"Hardly ever, monsieur. In the first place, I have no acquaintances in Paris, and to go to the play alone would scarcely be proper for a young girl."

"I have found the flaw in her shield," said Mardeille to himself, then he resumed,—

"Well, my charming neighbor, if you will consent I will take you to the theatre; we'll have a private box. Then one may be as comfortable as if in his own room."

"I don't know anything about your private boxes, monsieur; but when I go to the play, I don't go to conceal myself, I like to see and be seen."

"Oh, you like to be seen, what a coquette you are!"

"It's not because I am a coquette; in fact, monsieur, you must be aware that I can't go to the play with such a fashionable man as you in the simple dress I wear."

"I did not suppose you would go with that dressing-jacket and that little skirt, although the costume is divinely becoming to you; oh, you are delightful thus!"

"No, of course I shouldn't go in a dressing-jacket, but my dress is very modest; a linen gown, a little cap, a knitted fichu — that is my best."

"What, you haven't a bonnet, a modest little bonnet?"

"No, monsieur, I have not."

The fine gentleman rocked back and forth, balancing himself on his chair; he seemed to be reflecting, and at length he said,—

"After all, you must look charming in a cap. Besides, we can take a cab. Is it so settled? I will call for you this evening and take you if you will consent to it."

"What, monsieur, you will take a woman to the theatre in a cap, a holland gown and a knitted cape instead of a shawl?"

"Exactly so; I am exempt from prejudices. I should like to take you as you are now, if that were possible."

"Well, did you ever! I shouldn't have believed it!"

"That will prove to you, I hope, how much I love you."

"Why, no, that doesn't prove anything to me at all. And as to that, monsieur, I have more self-respect than you have, and I have enough

respect for your position to prevent me from wishing to compromise it. Fie! for shame! what would be thought of you, monsieur, if people were to see you squiring a woman in a cap?"

"Then, we'll take a cab."

"We can't go into the theatre in a cab. Ha, ha, ha! And as I have no desire to hide myself in a private box, when once we are in the theatre they'll have full time to admire my toilet."

M. de Mardeille rose and for a few moments walked about the room in silence; at length he exclaimed,—

"What would be necessary for you that you may come to the play with me, my pretty maid?"

"Why, nearly everything: a silk dress, they make such pretty gowns now, one could easily find one ready-made that would fit my figure; yes, and a pretty bonnet, a handsome shawl, cashmere or something almost as nice; and some gloves, pretty kid gloves."

M. de Mardeille began to walk up and down, hardly able to hide the grimace that had replaced his pleasant expression, then suddenly looking into the court he exclaimed,—

"I think some visitors are coming to my place. Yes, yes, they are coming to me. Good-day, my charming neighbor, pardon me a thousand times for my abrupt departure."

"Pray don't trouble yourself about that, monsieur."

Our exquisite had reached the door as he spoke; he quickly went up to his apartment, which he entered looking very much out of temper; and when Frontin said,—

"Did the little shirtmaker take monsieur's measure?"

He answered angrily,—

"Be quiet, idiot! I forbid you ever to speak to me of that little grisette."

CHAPTER VII

Love as Long as it Lasts. A Brooch

A week had gone by during which M. de Mardeille had not been to see Georgette again, nor had he ostentatiously placed himself at the windows which gave on to the court; but he had several times slyly peeped through the panes, softly lifting a corner of the curtain to do so. He had been rewarded by seeing his young neighbor coming and going about her modest apartments, just as nimble, as spruce, as graceful as ever. Then, when all was in order, she would station herself with her work at the window, ever and anon rising to attend to some trifling household matter, after which she would resume her seat and her needlework.

Each movement of the pretty shirtmaker made his heart bound; and on one occasion he had kicked Frontin for being impudent enough to laugh when he saw his master raise the curtain. However, it had flattered and pleased M. de Mardeille not a little to observe that although Mademoiselle Georgette responded amiably to the salutations of her other neighbors, she had not as yet admitted a single one of them to her rooms;

so that she had really conferred a favor upon him in consenting to receive him.

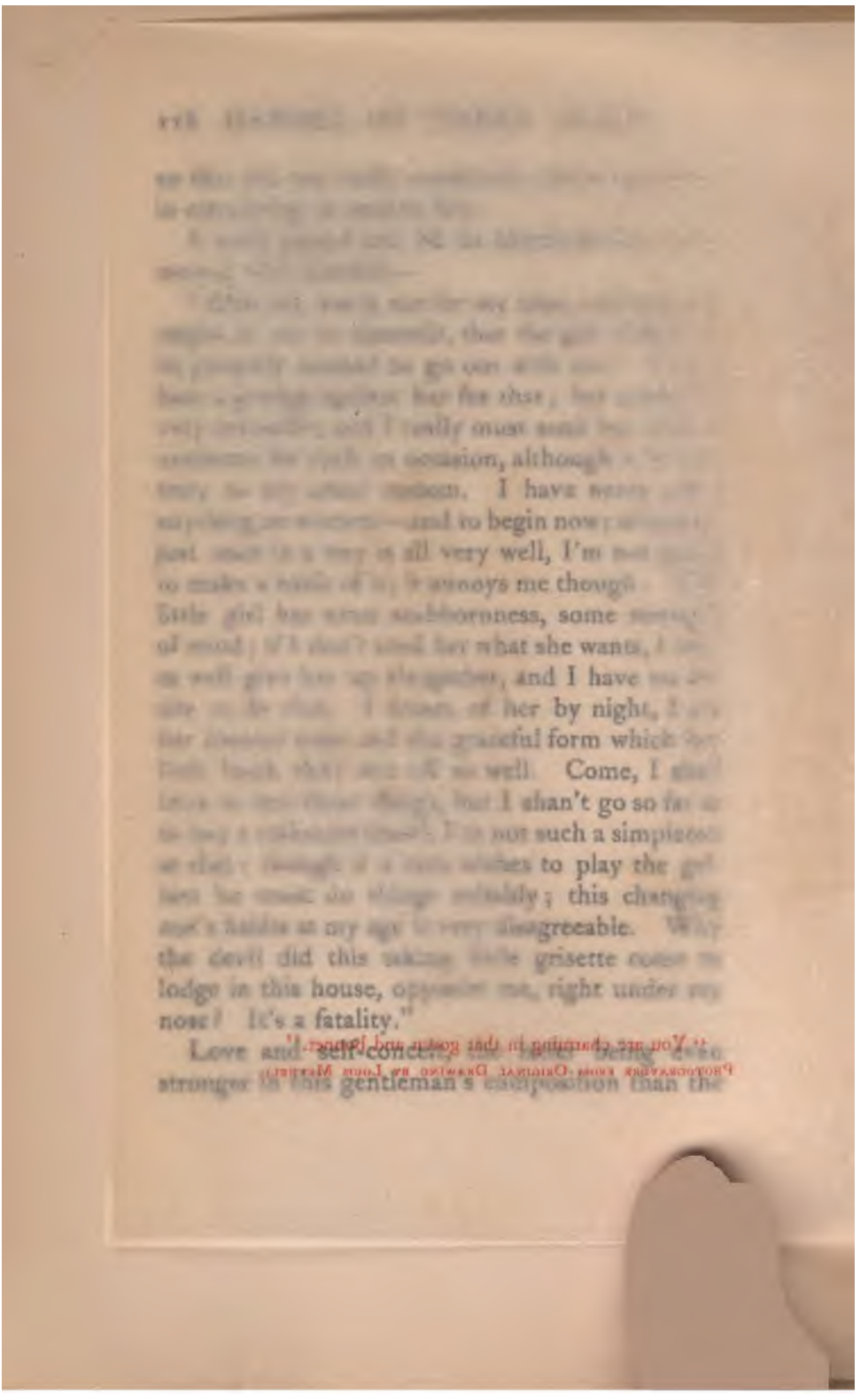
A week passed and M. de Mardeille thus communed with himself,—

"After all, was it not for my sake, and that she might do me no discredit, that the girl wished to be properly dressed to go out with me? I can't bear a grudge against her for that; her motive is very excusable, and I really must send her what is necessary for such an occasion, although it is contrary to my usual custom. I have never spent anything on women—and to begin now; of course, just once in a way is all very well, I'm not going to make a habit of it; it annoys me though. This little girl has some stubbornness, some strength of mind; if I don't send her what she wants, I may as well give her up altogether, and I have no desire to do that. I dream of her by night, I see her lissome waist and the graceful form which her little black skirt sets off so well. Come, I shall have to buy these things, but I shan't go so far as to buy a cashmere shawl, I'm not such a simpleton as that; though if a man wishes to play the gallant he must do things suitably; this changing one's habits at my age is very disagreeable. Why the devil did this taking little grisette come to lodge in this house, opposite me, right under my nose? It's a fatality."

Love and self-conceit, the latter being even stronger in this gentleman's composition than the

"You are charming in that gown and bonnet."

PHOTOGRAVURE FROM ORIGINAL DRAWING BY LOUIS MEYNELL.



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[illegible] I have [illegible] and to begin now; [illegible] just [illegible] is all very well, I'm [illegible] to make a [illegible] of it; it annoys me though. [illegible] little girl has [illegible] stubbornness, some [illegible] of mind; if I don't [illegible] her what she wants, I [illegible] as well [illegible], and I have [illegible] [illegible] of her by night, I [illegible] [illegible] graceful form which [illegible] [illegible] so well. Come, I [illegible] [illegible] but I shan't go so far [illegible] [illegible] not such a simpleton [illegible] to play the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]; this changing [illegible] at my age is very disagreeable. Why the devil did this [illegible] grisette come to lodge in this house, opposite me, right under my nose? It's a fatality."

Love and self-conceit, the latter being even stronger in this gentleman's composition than the

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former, at length carried the day. One morning Georgette received the shawl, the bonnet, the gown, and the kid gloves, with these few words written by her elegant neighbor,—

"Now, will you come with me this evening to the theatre?"

And Georgette gave her answer to the messenger,—

"Yes, I will go."

For M. de Mardeille, who did not wish anyone to know that he had been to any expense to please the shirtmaker, had not made use of Frontin in sending his present to her.

That evening, on the stroke of seven, the fine gentleman presented himself to Georgette, who was all ready, and who was probably less seductive in her new finery than in her morning-jacket and little skirt, but who was still very good to look at, because a young and pleasing woman could not be ugly in a fashionable bonnet. M. de Mardeille himself was surprised at the ease with which his little neighbor wore her new toilet.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, "you are charming in that gown and bonnet, you wear them with so much grace."

"Does that surprise you, monsieur?"

"Nothing astonishes me on your part; I believe there is nothing to which you might not aspire."

"I am ready, shall we start?"

"Oh, we are full early; give me a few moments that I may admire you."

"You can admire me at the theatre to your heart's content; but as I don't go often to the play, I wish to see the whole of it, so let's start."

Georgette had reached the landing as she spoke, and M. de Mardeille followed her, muttering to himself,—

"She is a little headstrong, it doesn't do to oppose her; but this evening as we come back from the theatre I flatter myself that she won't get rid of me so quickly."

It was still daylight when Georgette went forth from her modest lodging, stylishly dressed and leaning on M. de Mardeille's arm. All the neighbors were at their windows; and needless to say their tongues were all wagging.

"It's that old dandy who's taking her out; he's rich, he's fashionable, and that entices a young girl, whose self-conceit is flattered when a swell like that gives her his arm."

"And then he is still very good-looking, is this gentleman," said the miniature painter. "I conceive that he knew how to please the little thing. These young girls have a most astonishing taste for a well-built man."

"The Lovelace of the first floor has been to some expense, he has dressed our little neighbor from head to foot. These women allow themselves to be captivated through their love of dress."

"And we poor literary beggars can't offer her anything of the sort."

"It's very singular, because this De Mardeille has the reputation of being very close with women."

"That's a rumor he's set afloat to make believe that he is loved for himself alone."

The young doctor said nothing out loud, but he sighed and to himself he muttered,—

"She hasn't even had a cold."

M. Bistelle was furious, for she had received his bouquets but would not receive him; and she had refused all his propositions, which, however, had been very audacious. So when he saw the girl passing in her new attire he said to himself,—

"Why, that's niggardly, that is! Why that shawl isn't a cashmere, it isn't even a Lyons shawl; that gown is but poor flimsy silk; the bonnet isn't from one of our first milliners; it's all trashy, you can see that at a glance. I should have dressed the little thing a hundred times better. She was foolish to prefer De Mardeille to me, for he has never been generous to women."

This gentleman, needless to say, was very ugly, while his rival was still good-looking. But these are amongst the things that one never says to himself. Besides, one gets so used to one's own face during the course of life that it never seems ugly to him.

In fact, there was no one, up to the old bachelor,

M. Renardin, who did not pout very decidedly on seeing Georgette pass; the old clerk, in fact, pouted more than some of the others because his maid, Mademoiselle Arthémise, took the opportunity of saying to him, jeeringly,—

"See your flame there, going out arm-in-arm with the lady-killer of the first floor. Much good it does you to send boxes of candied fruit to such damsels as that! She's quite right to make game of you."

"In the first place, Arthémise, you are talking foolishly; that girl did not receive candied fruit from me, for the simple reason that you ate it yourself."

"God be thanked, I was there to stop it on its way, or she would have received it. You see now, it's very lucky I did eat it. You don't suppose, now, that this mincing miss would have put the box on her head to go out with you, do you? Oh, she's a sly jade, she's fleecing the would-be-young man of the first floor. She's right, too, for they say he's a mean curmudgeon with women; and it's only what he deserves."

M. de Mardeille had taken Georgette to the Ambigu-Comique. He had wished to occupy a snug little box with her, but she had refused to go into it and the gentleman had been obliged to take her into the balcony, where he was perforce compelled to conduct himself in the most strictly conventional manner. As a set-off against this

he was constantly pouring into her ear avowals of his passion for her until, at last, she said to him, impatiently,—

"Please be kind enough to stop talking, you prevent me from hearing the play, and I supposed that was what I came for."

M. de Mardeille bit his lips.

"There is," he said to himself, "nothing in the world so stupid as a young girl who goes to the play for the first time. I shan't take her there often, I can tell you."

The piece amused Georgette very much; while on the other hand it bored her squire to extinction and he saw it end with joy. He wanted to take a cab home; but the young girl absolutely refused to do anything but walk.

"But the rain is falling in great drops," said M. de Mardeille.

"Well, that will refresh us."

"But your bonnet is fresh and new, and it will be ruined, spoiled."

"That'll be a great misfortune! There are plenty more bonnets in the milliner's shops."

"Does she think I'm going to buy her a bonnet every day?" said her companion to himself; he could hardly restrain his anger at being compelled to return home on foot, with Georgette on his arm; and she, during the whole walk, would talk of nothing but the piece she had seen and the actors who had played in it.

At length they had reached home, and now M. de Mardeille was impatiently expectant of receiving the reward of his not altogether too pleasant evening. They entered the house and drew near the porter's lodge, which was at the foot of the staircase leading to the first floor dwelling.[1] Georgette stopped and curtseyed graciously to her squire.

"Good evening, monsieur," she said, "and a thousand thanks for the pleasure you have given me in taking me to the theatre."

"What do you mean by saying good evening so soon," exclaimed M. de Mardeille with a smile. "Why, I am not going to bed yet, and you will surely allow me to come and have a little chat with you."

"But I am going to bed, monsieur, and this is hardly the time for a chat."

"Why, you are not going to bed yet, surely. It's quite early, and you won't be keeping your lady's maid up to take off your finery."

"Hardly!" laughed Georgette, "nevertheless, I must leave you here and now, so good-night again, monsieur."

"Why, what does this mean? You must be joking, my charming neighbor, are you not willing to receive a little visit from me?"

"Tomorrow, monsieur, tomorrow; during the

[1] These Paris houses which are built around a court ordinarily have four staircases, one for each wing.

daytime, I shall be very glad to see you if it pleases you to come — but at the present time it would be very improper."

As she said these words, with a slight bow, Georgette quickly darted up her little staircase to the entresol. M. de Mardeille remained as if stunned in front of the porter's lodge, overcome by the conduct of the young girl.

"This is a little bit too much," he grumbled to himself, "she accepts my presents, a whole outfit — which I must say has cost me dear enough — and she has shown herself as intractable as she did before I gave them. She's making game of me, it seems, is this damsel."

Then suddenly perceiving the porter, who was observing from his lodge what was taking place outside, the court and the staircase being still lighted, our dandy struck his forehead impatiently.

"Idiot that I am," he said to himself, "I ought to have understood. This little thing has a hundred times more tact than I have. She naturally did not wish the porter to see me going to her rooms at midnight, for he would not fail to let everybody in the house know that I passed the night at my neighbor's. Yes, yes, and in that she was quite right. She has clearly pointed out my line of conduct. I must go up to my rooms and pretend to go to bed; then, when everybody is asleep and the gas is extinguished, I must come down again very softly and go over to the little

one's, who will be certain to leave her key outside the door. There's the way all laid out, I have only to follow it."

M. de Mardeille went up his own staircase, expressly making a good deal of noise with his feet. He went into his apartments, closing the door noisily after him, and when Frontin had attended to the duties of his toilet he sent him away, telling him to go to bed immediately. Half an hour passed, the gas was now extinguished, and all was still in the house; there was no light at any of the neighbors', not even at Georgette's, and M. de Mardeille remarked to himself,—

"That young girl remembers everything; she is prudence itself. She has even put out her light. Very good, darkness renders one more daring. I must hasten, for the shepherd's hour has struck."

The gentleman very softly left his rooms, first enveloping himself in a vast dressing-gown and putting his gay smoking-cap on his head; he groped his way downstairs, being careful to make no noise; he passed lightly by the porter's lodge, in which the lights were extinguished; everywhere darkness reigned, and in trying to grope his way across the court our gallant bumped his nose on the pump; but this served him as a compass, as the door of Georgette's little staircase was close by; he found it and went slowly up, muttering,—

"Here I am at last!"

In fact, he had reached Georgette's door, where

he searchingly groped for the key; but, contrary to his expectations, it was not in the lock, and the door was shut fast.

"She didn't think to leave the key outside," said M. de Mardeille; "she must have forgotten it. Perhaps that was modesty, so as not to seem to be expecting me? I must let her know, however, that I am here; I must knock very softly. She can't be asleep."

He knocked softly, two little raps, then a much louder one.

"Come now, she doesn't hear me," he muttered. "Can she be gone to sleep already? It's very strange — there's no other noise in the house, she ought to hear me. Well, so much the worse, I must awaken her, and if others hear me it will be her fault."

M. de Mardeille knocked much louder, then louder still, then louder and longer still, and shouted through the door,—

"Little neighbor, it's me, open the door for a minute, won't you? I have forgotten something that I left in your rooms. Charming Georgette, it's really enough to drive me mad! You are a most provoking little thing! Come, you must open the door to me, I have some very interesting things to tell you. Please, just long enough for me to say two words to you; then I will leave you."

His trouble and his prayers were useless, no one

answered him, and the door did not open. After waiting for about three-quarters of an hour, the discomfited gallant angrily pulled his smoking-cap down over his forehead and went down the entresol stairs, bumping himself against the walls in the dark.

To increase his chagrin, when he reached the court he heard shrieks of laughter coming from several windows, and he recognized Mademoiselle Arthémise's voice, for she was shouting as loud as she could,—

"Why, that was well done, indeed. She's outwitted that walking scent-bottle. The little girl makes game of her lovers, and that reconciles me to her. Ha, ha! it's a case of singing:—

My candle's gone out,
And so is my fire;
Won't you open your door?
It is all I desire."

M. de Mardeille had not closed his eyes during the whole night. He was horribly vexed and awaited the morrow impatiently, that he might have an explanation with the little shirtmaker, whom he intended to reproach sharply. He considered that he had the right to do so, because he asserted that in love it ought to be give and take, and therefore one gives nothing without expecting something in return.

Day broke at last, people were going and coming about the house. Our dandy rose. His first

act was to look in his glass, and he found he was frightfully pale, his eyes were red, he looked terribly tired; and as of all things this gentleman wished to look young and handsome, he passed more than an hour in the adornment of his person, changing his cravat and his waistcoat several times without succeeding in finding anything that would restore his ordinary fresh look. At length, wearied by his efforts, he gave it up.

"A certain degree of pallor makes one look interesting," he said to himself; "women rather like a melancholy-looking man. This hard-hearted little girl may perhaps be touched by my looks of suffering. Decidedly, it's a good thing that I am a little pale — it is very suitable under the circumstances."

M. de Mardeille then went over to his little neighbor's, crossing the court as quickly as possible to avoid the neighbors' curious looks. This time the key was in the door, and he entered the room brusquely. Georgette, who was seated at her work, smiled rather saucily when she saw him.

"Good-day, monsieur," she said, "it is very kind of you to come and see me. Sit down, will you not? and we'll talk about the play we saw yesterday."

But M. de Mardeille, declining the offer of a chair, walked agitatedly about the room and answered irritably,—

"Mademoiselle, I did not come here to talk about the play."

"Indeed! Well, then, we'll talk about something else."

"Mademoiselle, you sleep very sound."

"Oh, no, you are quite mistaken as to that; I am a very light sleeper — the slightest sound awakens me."

"The slightest sound! how is it then that you did not hear me last night at your door, where I knocked for more than half an hour without your deigning to answer me?"

"Yesterday? Oh, I heard you plainly enough, monsieur; too plainly, indeed."

"Then, mademoiselle, why did you not open the door to me?"

"Why? Well, monsieur, because it didn't suit me to do so, because I'm not in the habit of receiving visitors at midnight; and because I think that the rumpus you made at my door was highly improper."

"The rumpus! But if you had opened the door at first I should not have made a rumpus, as you call it."

"Yes, and when I did not choose to open the door, you should not have gone on knocking."

"Why, mademoiselle, it seemed to me that I had the right to come and see you — that I had a right to expect a kindly reception. When a woman receives presents from a man she ought to treat him well, and not leave him unanswered at the door when he calls to see her."

"The right! the right!" cried Georgette, rising and darting such an angry look at De Mardeille that he was stunned by it. "I would have you know that I consider you very impertinent, and I ought to send you right out of my room and forbid you ever to set your foot here again. The right! What do you mean by that, monsieur? Is it because you sent me some trifling articles of dress that you allow yourself to talk in this fashion? I would have you know, monsieur, that I did you a great honor in accepting your superb presents. If you had not wanted me to go out with you, no doubt you would not have made them. So then, it was rather to satisfy your vanity than to please me that you sent me those things; and since you imagine that I was going, because of them, to open my door to you at midnight, you perhaps had other ideas of me which were still worse;— why, monsieur, you are mad! Here, take your presents. Oh, I don't want to keep them, you may take them all back. Wait. This will show you how much I think of them."

So saying, Georgette ran to her wardrobe and took therefrom the gown, the shawl, and the bonnet, threw them all on the ground, and kicked them towards M. de Mardeille, who was terrified and dared not stir.

When she had done this, Georgette returned to her seat beside the window, which was open as usual, and took up her sewing again without

seeming to notice that her neighbor was still there, standing stock still, like a post.

Some minutes passed thus. The fine gentleman had had time for reflection, and he began by picking up the bonnet, the gown, and the shawl and putting them all on the nearest piece of furniture; then he came towards Georgette and stammered in much confusion,—

"Mademoiselle, I was wrong, I was very wrong, I am convinced of it."

"It's fortunate that you perceive it, monsieur."

"I should not have thought — or rather, I should not have hoped to — and I certainly did not intend to set a price on the trifle I sent you. It wasn't that that made me come and knock at your door last night, but I thought you had been touched by my feeling for you, that you no longer doubted its sincerity — that is what urged me to come and knock here yesterday evening after the play. Pray, pray forgive me, my dear neighbor; don't be angry with me, for that would make me too unhappy."

Georgette smiled, as she answered,—

"Since you realize that you were in the wrong I will forgive you. Oh, I am not one to bear a grudge. I say what I think on the spur of the moment; and after that I think no more about it."

The fine gentleman took the young girl's hand and carried it respectfully to his lips. She withdrew it and said, as she pointed to a chair,—

"Now, sit down and let us talk of something else."

"Something else!" said M. de Mardeille, in a low tone, "It is difficult for me to refrain from speaking of my love when I am near you — does that cause you annoyance?"

"No; but have you forgotten what I have already told you?"

"By Jove! possibly I have; what did you say to me on this subject?"

"I told you I did not believe in any man's love until he had given me proofs of it."

"Yes, that is true; I remember now — proofs. Only I do not fully understand what you mean by that."

"Oh, monsieur, I think I should be doing you an injustice in explaining myself further," answered Georgette mockingly. "So much the worse for you if you do not understand me."

"And did you enjoy the play, yesterday?" inquired M. de Mardeille, hastening to change the subject.

"Yes, monsieur, very much indeed; I should go there very often if I had the means to do so."

"But if some one takes you that's the same thing, isn't it?"

"No, it is not the same thing to be able to go when one pleases one's self as to go only when it pleases others to invite one."

"Well, my pretty neighbor, whenever it pleases

you to go again I am entirely at your orders, and I shall be delighted to escort you at any time."

"You are only too kind, monsieur. Did you notice yesterday in the theatre that lady in pink who was in one of the stage boxes?"

"In a box in the proscenium?"

"I don't know whether they call it the proscenium, but it was a lady who wore a kind of diadem of flowers; and she was very, very pretty."

"Why, yes, I remember, a beautiful fair woman — that is Irma, a fashionable beauty."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes, as one knows a good many of those ladies one meets at all the Casino balls; at all the first nights at the play; at all the entertainments, in fact, where one gains admission by payment."

"Is that lady married?"

"Married! No; she is a gay woman."

"Oh, she's a gay woman — well, any way, she was very richly dressed. She had a magnificent diamond collarette and brooch; for they were diamonds, were they not, monsieur?"

"They were — or at least, they looked like it; they might, however, be false. Now, they make imitation diamonds so like real ones that anybody is liable to be deceived; they are quite as pretty, and some of them even show off better, owing to the manner in which they are set."

"What, false diamonds! horrors! You'd never get me to wear anything false!"

M. de Mardeille looked at his watch, then he rose, saying,—

"How quickly time passes when I am with you, charming Georgette. But I have an appointment at my banker's and I have only just time to get there. Good-by for the present, my dear neighbor. You are no longer displeased with me, that is settled, isn't it?"

"No, I am not angry now, monsieur; that is all past and gone, and forgotten."

The fine gentleman bowed and left the young girl.

"She's forgotten all that's passed," said he to himself, doubtfully, as he went down the stairs. "Consequently, she has entirely forgotten that I've given her a complete outfit. And here just now she was talking to me of diamonds; but come now, that's altogether too strong. This little girl is exorbitant in her demands. Does she expect to be decked out like Irma? I can't imagine such a thing,— a shirtmaker who desires diamonds! I never expected to find a grisette so difficult to please — it's the first time it ever happened to me. She speaks to me with so much self-assurance. She is no fool — and the worst of it is that when she becomes animated her eyes sparkle so — have such an expression, that she looks quite ravishing — she's a little demon. But give her diamonds I won't; no, never, never, I would much rather swallow them."

Several weeks passed. M. de Mardeille still made his diurnal visits to Georgette, who received him as usual and kept her windows open whenever he came. But the gentleman made not the smallest progress in his wooing. When he tried to seat himself near the young girl, the latter obliged him to draw his chair away; if he took her hand, she withdrew it, and if he snatched at her skirt as she passed, hoping to pass his arm around her slender waist, she would push him forcibly away, and putting on a severe look would exclaim,—

"I do not allow any one to touch me in that way — it is entirely forbidden."

Then this ardent swain would heave great sighs, to which she would reply with shouts of laughter and saucy looks that made her still prettier; for while strictly holding her neighbor within respectful bounds, Mademoiselle Georgette was highly skilled in employing the whole battery of coquetries which involve a man still more deeply in the meshes of love and end in making him lose his head.

So it came about that at the end of this time as he one day left Georgette, who had been going back and forth in her room arrayed in her bewitching costume, M. de Mardeille exclaimed,—

"Come, there's no way of evading it, I must send her a little brooch set with diamonds — rose diamonds — something that doesn't cost too much;

it must, however, be pretty or else, if I know the damsel, she will be quite capable of making fun of me. Oh, these women! — and I who have never spent a sou on them to come to this — this little one has upset all my habits and I'm just as foolish now as other men in the same case."

The next day when he appeared at his neighbor's, M. de Mardeille was cheerful, amiable, almost giddy; one would have thought he was a young man of twenty years. When he had seated himself as near Georgette as he dared, he drew from his pocket a little cardboard box and presented it to her.

"Permit me, my charming girl," said he, "to offer you this pledge, this proof of my love, and be assured that in offering it I do not imagine that it gives me the least claim on your affection, I wish that to be entirely spontaneous."

"Come now, that is a very pretty speech, indeed," answered Georgette, who hastily opened the box and disclosed a little brooch which might be worth eight or nine hundred francs and which made a goodly show for the money.

"Why, this is very gallant of you," cried the young girl. "Decidedly, you are improving, monsieur."

"What, I am improving?" said De Mardeille to himself. "What does she mean by that? But there, I won't ask her — that little gift will touch her, and I feel assured that tomorrow she will

herself say to me, 'I shall expect to see you this evening.'"

"The brooch is indeed very beautiful," resumed Georgette.

"Will you do me the kindness to accept it?"

"Will I accept it? Why certainly, monsieur; and I am very grateful to you for it."

"She's very grateful to me for it — very good; the thing will go of itself now. I am not so ill-advised now as to wish to be paid for my present; I must take my departure at once."

M. de Mardeille rose, saying,—

"I must leave you now, my dear neighbor."

"What, must you go so soon, monsieur?"

"That sounds very kindly coming from your mouth. It is with great regret that I leave so early; but tomorrow I hope to be more fortunate."

"I hope so, too, monsieur."

The gentleman bowed very respectfully to the young girl without even taking her hand; he departed, delighted with the progress he had made.

"I have taken the best means," he said to himself. "Women in general are so contrary that one only has to avoid asking them for anything for them to freely give everything; now I really think that little thing is mine."

CHAPTER VIII

Colinet's Second Visit. A Pleasant Breakfast

Upon the day after that marked by the gift of the diamond brooch, M. de Mardeille, whose vanity deluded him and caused him to be lulled by the sweetest hopes, rose from his bed with the following reflections,—

"I must dress myself carefully, make the most of myself this morning. But I must be in no haste, I must be careful not to go too early to see my young friend; it is always well to make one's presence desired. So after I have had my breakfast and glanced at my paper I shall go and sit at the window for a bit, then Georgette will be sure to make me a sign to come to her which I shall be only too happy to do. Yes, that certainly is the wisest plan."

M. de Mardeille took his breakfast in a leisurely methodical fashion; he tasted his mocha with the appreciation of a connoisseur, as he mentally tasted the approaching culmination of his hopes; at length, after scanning the news and the monetary articles in several of the lesser journals, he went towards one of the windows which looked into the

court, thinking that he had deferred doing so long enough to make his presence desired. Opening the window he immediately looked down into his little neighbor's and saw, seated beside Georgette, a young man who held both her hands and looked tenderly into her eyes.

The gallant Mardeille frowned, pinched his lips, and glared furiously at them as he exclaimed,—

"By jingo! there's a young man with her — a young man! and she is supposed to receive no one but me. This is her gratitude for my brooch. We'll see about this! I shan't let her make a fool of me in this way. I must learn who this young man is that is holding both her hands while she'll hardly allow me to take one."

The person whom her neighbor saw in the damsel's room was that young Colinet with whom we are already acquainted. He was dressed almost the same as when he paid his first visit to her; only a pair of linen trousers had replaced the cloth ones, and a light cane had also replaced his thick walnut stick. But the greatest change had taken place in his face; during the three months his ingenuous and timid air had given way to a more self-reliant, reflective expression, his countenance was as frank and as open as of yore, but the simple expression had disappeared.

"How pleased I am to see you once again, Mamzelle Georgette," said Colinet, taking the young girl's hands.

"I too, am glad to see you, Colinet; it makes me very happy. And you say they are all well at home? my mother, my father, both my sisters?"

"Yes, mamzelle, I left them all in good health, and here is a letter that Mamzelle Suzanne, your second sister, gave to me for you."

"Give it to me; give it quickly, Colinet."

Georgette hastily seized the letter which the young man had brought her; she tore open the envelope and read it to herself; and one could see by the interest shown on her face that its contents were of great moment. While Georgette was reading, Colinet looked about him; he seemed to be inspecting the chamber.

"This is a very pleasant room," he muttered, "and a good deal sweller than the one down there."

Georgette had finished reading her letter, she thrust it into her bosom, and smiled again at Colinet, who said to her,—

"Will that letter induce you to go back to the country?"

"Not yet, Colinet."

"You still like Paris best, then?"

"It is not that, my friend; but I came here with an object in view, and I shall not leave Paris until I have accomplished what I have undertaken."

"You have some work to do here?"

"Yes, my friend."

"And won't you tell me what it is? I might, perhaps, be able to help you."

"No, you can't help me; and it is much better that I should not tell you now what I want to do; but some day you shall know all about it, and you will not blame me, Colinet. I am certain of that."

"Ah, Mamzelle Georgette, I shall never blame you, and I know that you are incapable of doing anything wrong. Only you are rather — what at home they call headstrong, and when you have resolved on doing a thing, nothing will suit you but to do it."

"Unless one does wrong, is there any harm in being determined?"

"No, no; there is no harm in anything you do. But formerly you used to call me 'thou'; now I notice with pain that you seldom say anything to me but 'you.'"[1]

Georgette colored and answered,—

"That's true, Colinet; but that should not pain you, on the contrary; I like you just as much as I ever did, only — it seems to me I ought not to speak as familiarly to you now as I did when we were little."

"If you are as fond of me as you were then, I ought not to complain; as for myself, I love you more and more every day."

[1] Among the French the second person is used between relatives and intimate friends, and implies familiarity or affection.

"So much the better — that fulfils my wishes; and don't change, Colinet, in that respect, for I value your love."

"Mamzelle Georgette, when anyone loves, do you suppose they can change?"

"Kiss me, Colinet."

"Yes, with a good heart."

M. de Mardeille had not seen his neighbor and the young man kissing, because this had all taken place before he came to the window. After kissing Georgette, Colinet inquired,—

"And that M. Dupont I met so often in your rooms on my last visit, does he still come to see you?"

"No, Colinet, I don't see anything of M. Dupont now."

The young man smiled and appeared delighted at this intelligence; but his brow grew gloomy when the young girl added,—

"I don't see that gentleman now, but I see another."

"What, you've made acquaintance with some one else?"

"Yes, a very fine gentleman who lives in this house; he comes very often to see me."

"Very often?"

"It's probable that you'll see him appear in a minute. Then as I shall tell him, which is quite true, that you are one of the friends of my childhood, don't forget that I am from Normandy."

"Normandy, but that, at any rate, isn't true!"

"I know that very well, Colinet; but that is exactly what this gentleman must not know. Above all things, don't mention my parents' name before him — be very careful about that."

"But why should you make all this mystery with this gentleman? You've never done anything wrong, I believe, and why should you conceal the name of your family, mamzelle?"

"Colinet, you've told me you had confidence in me."

"Why, certainly, and I always shall have it."

"In that case, my friend, refrain from asking questions which I cannot now answer. I have told you that some day everything shall be explained to you, and that ought to be enough."

"That is true, mamzelle; it was wrong of me to pester you with questions; I won't do so again, and there's an end to that. Then you are from Normandy?"

"Yes, from a little village near Rouen."

"And the name of the village?"

"The name? I don't know; what does it matter? The first one that comes; this gentleman doesn't know all the neighborhoods of Rouen. Wait a bit! Belair, there are Belairs everywhere."

"That's settled then; and I, do I come from Normandy also?"

"Of course."

"And can I still raise calves?"

"Why not? They raise cattle everywhere. Hush! I hear my neighbor."

M. de Mardeille had crossed the court like a shot out of a gun; he had come up without taking breath, and he entered his little neighbor's room like a bombshell, and went towards her without even returning Colinet's bow — the young man had politely risen as he entered the room — then he placed himself in front of Georgette and said, in a guttural voice,—

"It is I, mademoiselle."

Georgette smiled and answered,—

"So I see, monsieur."

"You did not expect me — at least, not at this moment, I suppose?"

"And why not, monsieur? I never expect you. You come whenever it pleases you; between neighbors, one doesn't stand on ceremony."

"Yes, but I believed — I did not expect to find visitors here. I thought you told me you received no one but me."

The expression of the young girl's face became serious and severe; she glanced angrily at M. de Mardeille, and exclaimed,—

"In the first place, monsieur, I think what you are saying is in extremely bad taste. If up to the present it has not suited me to receive the visits of others, understand, once and for all, that it was not to please you that I refrained from doing so."

"Mademoiselle, I —"

"One would think, to hear you, that I was dependent upon you and that you possessed some rights over me. You make me ashamed for you, monsieur."

The fine gentleman became as red as a turkey-cock; he stamped his feet and tore his gloves, but he did not know what to answer.

"To-day this friend of my childhood, who has just come up from my part of the country, called upon me to bring me news of my parents. He will always be welcome to me. I was going to present you, monsieur, when you came in and began your ridiculous speeches. You did not have the politeness to return the bow my friend Colinet made when you came in,— you, monsieur, who understand the usages of polite society so well! Allow me to believe that you are not yourself this morning, and that something has agitated your mind. Colinet, be seated, my friend."

M. de Mardeille did not know where he was; Georgette's proud look had transfixed him where he stood; at length he turned towards Colinet and bowed ceremoniously to him, and then he decided to sit down.

"Yes," he said, in a low tone, "you are right. I have a headache this morning, a very bad headache, and I feel very unwell."

"Very well, now you tell us that we will excuse you for being in a bad humor. Colinet, are you going to stay long in Paris."

"Oh, no, Mamzelle Georgette; I am only here for a day or so; I leave tomorrow afternoon."

The neighbor's face resumed its amiable expression; he balanced himself on his chair.

"What makes you in so much of a hurry?"

"Why, I have several commissions to do before I go back. We have sold some calves, and I must get the money for them."

"Do you raise cattle, monsieur?" asked Mardeille of Colinet.

"Yes, monsieur; I deal especially in horned cattle, because there is always a demand for them."

"Yes, yes; it is a good business."

Then, leaning towards Georgette, the neighbor said, in an almost timid tone,—

"You haven't put on your brooch."

"My brooch with this dressing-jacket!" answered Georgette, laughing, "as if one put on a brooch so early as this."

"Are you going to roast a chicken?" asked Colinet. "If you like, I will help you; I understand all about roasting chickens."

Georgette shrieked with laughter, and M. de Mardeille tried to do the same, but his laughter was not sincere.

"My dear Colinet, there is no question of a fowl, the brooch is a different one from that you are thinking of,"[1] said the young girl when her

[1] Broche: the French for brooch, is also the word for "spit"; hence Colinet's mistake.

laughter had subsided. "I don't do such grand cooking as that. My meals are a good deal more modest. However, my friend, tomorrow you will come and breakfast with me before leaving; I shall have a pie and a sausage; those, with a good appetite, will make a very acceptable breakfast, won't they?"

"Surely, they will, mamzelle; I shall take care to be here for it."

"If you would join us, M. de Mardeille, if our breakfast is not too humble, we shall be pleased to have you come."

The neighbor's face became suddenly radiant, it was like the sun breaking forth from behind a cloud, as he bowed and exclaimed,—

"Humble! Any meal at which you preside would seem delicious to me. Only I shall ask your permission to send a few bottles of old wine from my cellar; that will hurt nobody."

"Oh, send anything you like; we are not proud, Colinet and I, we accept anything that is offered us."

"In that case, my charming neighbor, it's an understood thing that I breakfast with you tomorrow, and in the mean time I will leave you, for you must have a thousand things to say to monsieur about your parents and friends, and messages to send to your family, and I should be sorry to be in your way. Good-by, my dear neighbor; good-day, monsieur, until tomorrow. At what hour do you breakfast, neighbor?"

"Why, at ten o'clock."

"Very well, I shall be prompt."

The fine gentleman was as highly pleased when he went off as he had been highly incensed when he came in; a few words from Georgette had sufficed to work this change. It is true that her manner of saying them was such as to admit of no reply.

Colinet seemed to reflect when her neighbor had gone, and Georgette said to him,—

"What are you thinking of, my friend?"

"Of that gentleman who was here just now. How he spoke to you when he came in."

"And you heard how I answered him."

"Yes, and I was very much pleased. So he's paying court to you, this middle-aged beau?"

"Yes, but don't be afraid, Colinet, he's no more dangerous to me than was M. Dupont."

"Since you say so I believe it, but why did you ask him to breakfast with us tomorrow? I should have been much better pleased to breakfast with you alone."

"And I too, my friend; but I have done what I ought to do, for I don't want to make my neighbor angry again, and that is just what I should have done if I had not invited him. I'm going to answer my sister Suzanne's letter, then I must write to Aimée. Tomorrow I'll entrust you with my messages."

"Well, then, I'll be off to attend to several com-

missions; for when one comes to Paris you know how they are in the country, it's who can give you the most to do for them. I have promised to dine with some friends, and I shan't see you again till tomorrow."

"Come early, then, so we can have time to chat a little before breakfast."

"Yes, Mamzelle Georgette, but what happiness it would have been just to breakfast together, the two of us."

"A time is coming, Colinet, when we shall often be together alone — but then you will desire it less, perhaps."

"Ah, Georgette, you don't believe that!"

As her only answer, the young girl extended her hand to the friend of her infancy; the latter took it and covered it with kisses, and it was necessary for Georgette to remind him of his commissions before he could make up his mind to leave her.

On the following day at nine o'clock in the morning, Frontin brought to Georgette's apartment a jar of pâte-de-foies-gras, a knuckle of Rheims ham, some cakes, some fine fruits, some bordeaux, madeira, and champagne. The valet, who remembered how he had spoken to the young shirtmaker, was now as polite as he had formerly been impertinent.

Georgette received everything without appearing in the least surprised, while Colinet, who was

already with his countrywoman, opened his eyes in astonishment, as he exclaimed,—

"What! are we going to eat all that? Why, what a spread, Mamzelle Georgette, what a feast! this gentleman must be very much in love with you to send so many good things."

"Do you think they prove his love, Colinet?"

"Why, gifts like these must always prove something."

"Yes, and in this case they prove something — but not love; you know, Colinet, there are women who allow themselves to be led astray by their love of gourmandizing."

"Yes, indeed, one sees a good many of them. Why, down our way there was Manette who went into the little wood with Blaise to eat a plum pie. But you are not that kind of girl, Georgette."

"No, indeed; I shall eat of all those things and my neighbor will have his pains for his trouble. Colinet, you won't forget to give my sisters the letters which I have given you?"

"Well, I like that! do I ever forget anything you tell me? Besides, Suzanne and Aimée always expect your letters so impatiently."

"I can well believe that, my poor sisters."

"Are you writing them that you are soon coming back to the country?"

"Not yet, my friend; not yet."

"Are you going to stay much longer in Paris, then?"

"Heaven alone knows! I can't tell anything about it."

"Your mother, good mamma Granery, so often longs to see you."

"Dear mother! Well, Colinet, tell her that my love for her is the same as ever, that she will never have to blush for me, and that I will — but silence, I hear M. de Mardeille."

The neighbor of the first floor came in, cheerful, amiable, and smiling; he greeted Georgette with deferential homage and slapped Colinet's shoulder familiarly.

"Really, monsieur, it was very kind of you to send us so many nice things. My poor little pie will be quite out of place among your fine presents."

"You are joking, my dear neighbor, we shall feast on your pie as well as on the other good things; shall we not, Monsieur Colinet?"

"Yes, monsieur; I desire nothing better."

"In that case, monsieur, let us come to the table."

They seated themselves at a table which, though not elegant, was neatly and daintily laid. In place of one of those monstrous centrepieces which are supposed to adorn fine tables, the young girl had put flowers; and women know how to arrange flowers with so much taste that they are always a delightful adornment. Georgette did the honors of her table without being in the least embarrassed or awkward; and of course she sat down to her

breakfast in her little dressing-jacket and petticoat, in which she looked as charming as possible.

"You will excuse me, monsieur, for not having dressed for the occasion, will you not?" she said to her neighbor; "but I am more used to this dress, and then I am afraid of spoiling my beautiful gown."

"You look delightful in that costume, my little neighbor; and I should have been very sorry for you to change it. Are you not of my opinion, M. Colinet; and do you not think mademoiselle is very provoking in this charming negligé?"

Colinet was busily plying his knife and fork; however, he shook his head and answered,—

"I am used to seeing mamzelle like that; in our part of the country no one dresses except on high days and holidays."

"What is the name of the place you come from?"

The young bachelor looked at Georgette and she divined that he had forgotten the name she had told him, so she hastily answered for him,—

"Belair, monsieur."

"Belair, I didn't know there was a town of that name in Normandy."

"It is not a town, it is a village."

"Oh, if it is but a village, that's different. Come, you must drink, M. Colinet. Don't you like wine?"

"Yes, monsieur, above all when it is as good as this is."

"Besides, in your country you never drink anything but cider."

"Cider!" Colinet looked greatly astonished, but Georgette touched him with her foot under the table and exclaimed,—

"Mercy, yes, cider; you know well enough that at home in Normandy cider is commoner than wine. And indeed, Colinet, I advise you not to drink too much of this, for it will soon make you tipsy."

"Why, no, don't be afraid of that," said M. de Mardeille; "pure wines never make one ill."

"You must be careful though. Why, if you should get tipsy you would not be able to go home to-day."

Georgette's reflection stopped the fine gentleman, who was about to refill the young man's glass; for he confessed to himself that it would be extremely ill-advised for him to prevent the friend of her infancy from leaving Paris.

They sat for a long time over the breakfast. Colinet knew how to keep his wits about him, even while doing honor to the neighbor's wine. Georgette was careful to change the conversation whenever M. de Mardeille spoke of Normandy. When one o'clock struck, M. de Mardeille rose, saying,—

"I must go to the Exchange."

"I must think about starting for home," said Colinet.

"A pleasant journey to you, M. Colinet. We shall meet again, I hope."

"Oh, yes," said Georgette; "you will certainly meet again."

M. de Mardeille left, and Colinet sighed as he said,—

"That gentleman is happier than I am, for he will remain near you, while I must leave you."

"No, Colinet, he is not happier than you are; for I love you, and I shall never have either love or friendship for that gentleman."

"Then you are right, and I am happier than he. His breakfast was very good; but all the same I should prefer nothing but potatoes if I could eat them with you alone."

"And I, also, my friend."

"Then why was it necessary to invite him?"

"Are you going to begin your questions all over again, Colinet?"

"Oh, no, no; excuse me, that is all done with."

"Come, kiss me and go, and be sure and kiss my father and mother for me, and my sisters."

"Be easy about that; I shan't fail to do so."

Colinet kissed Georgette and went off as downcast as he had been on his first visit.

CHAPTER IX

Twelve Thousand Francs. A Package

In the afternoon, about five o'clock, M. de Mardeille returned to Georgette's, for she was still sitting at the window and he saw that she was alone.

"Well, so your young countryman is gone?" said the gentleman.

"Yes, monsieur, he went long ago, shortly after you left."

"The young man seems very fond of you, Mademoiselle Georgette."

"Yes, monsieur, he is a true friend, of long standing," answered the young girl.

"But, really now, is he only your friend? Isn't he also your lover?"

"I have told you that I have no lover, which is the truth, monsieur; and I may add without falsehood that I have never had one," said Georgette rather sharply.

"I believe you, my dear neighbor," M. de Mardeille hastened to affirm. "I firmly believe you, although it is rare to meet in Paris a young girl of twenty years — you are twenty, I think I have heard you say, mademoiselle?"

"Twenty years and six months, monsieur."

"And six months — that makes it still stranger — who has never had a lover. It is quite idyllic. But it is your intention never to let your heart go out of your own keeping?"

"I don't know, monsieur; one cannot answer for circumstances."

"Bravo! that's very well said."

M. de Mardeille drew his chair near Georgette's, and added in a low tone,—

"And if circumstances should bring you into contact with a man who adores you and who would count it his happiness to make you happy — a man like myself, for instance — then, would you give him your heart?"

"Why, I don't know; women are so weak."

"Ah, my darling, I am the happiest of men — you crown all my hopes."

So saying, M. de Mardeille stretched his hand towards the little black skirt and was about to pass his arm around Georgette's waist, when she quickly drew back her chair, gave him a smart rap on the hand, and said in a very serious tone,—

"Well, monsieur, and what do you mean by such conduct? what manners are these? I have told you before that they do not suit me."

The fine gentleman stamped his foot angrily, and exclaimed,—

"By Jove! mademoiselle, you are making game of me, after all. You let me think you will be

cruel no longer, and then you forbid me the slightest privilege. What do you mean by that? Where do we stand? I should like to know my position in this matter."

"I am by no means making game of you, monsieur; but why did you think I should be so ready to yield to your wishes?"

"Why did I think so? — that's very pretty, when I have been dancing attendance on you for two months past, and when I have sacrificed so much for you. I won't speak of the articles of dress, those are mere trifles; but then, you seemed to wish for a diamond brooch, which I sent to you immediately. This was not a trifle, permit me to say — and when such presents are accepted —"

"The one who receives them should immediately prove complaisant to the giver — that is what you meant to say, isn't it?"

"Faith, yes; that is the usual thing, at least."

"Well now, monsieur, that is not my idea at all."

"Then, mademoiselle, what are your ideas? or rather your pretensions? for I no longer understand you."

"Come, M. de Mardeille, do you wish that I should explain myself very frankly to you? that I should tell you what I have resolved upon, in fact?"

"Yes, explain yourself; that will be quite agreeable to me. Speak; I am anxious to hear what you have to say."

"Listen to me then, monsieur. If, softened and flattered by the gift of a diamond brooch, I should yield to your wishes to-day, as you assert I ought to do, what would be the result, monsieur? When once your love, or rather your caprice was satisfied, for with most men like you love is only a caprice —"

M. de Mardeille interrupted her,—

"Oh, can you believe that I should cease to love you?"

"Yes, monsieur, yes, I do believe it, in fact, I have not the slightest doubt of it. But please let me say what I have to say. Well, if I were weak enough, foolish enough, to speak plainly, to give way to your entreaties, then,—in a month, two months, say three if you like, you would have had enough of the little grisette. She would weary you, and you would cease to see her; to put it still stronger, you would fly from her with even greater haste than you used in seeking her. Here is the young girl, then, abandoned by the man for whom she has sacrificed all, whose vows she has believed; and this man, after unfitting her for work by a life of ease and pleasure, leaves her, more often than not, with no resource against the direst poverty. Nor is that all. If the young girl's unhappiness were the only result it would be comparatively well; but the punishment of such sin seldom falls upon her alone. Often, only too often, alas! a poor child is born of this fleeting

union. Then the wretched girl, who by her ill-paid labor was barely able to support herself alone, is quite unable to maintain herself and her infant. Is not this frightful? And should not one dread the prospect of such a terrible future?"

"Oh, mademoiselle, you create imaginary events, chimeras. You are making a romance."

"Nay, monsieur, that is not romance. I speak of what I see, of what happens every day. You yourself, monsieur, who assert that I am inventing chimeras, be frank, if that is possible, and tell me whether you have never happened to lead astray and to desert some poor girl in the manner which I have described. Look back over your life, your loves and your numerous conquests, and tell me, monsieur, if you can positively assert that such a thing has never happened."

M. de Mardeille had changed color; he rose with a sullen face and walked up and down the room, muttering,—

"Good God! mademoiselle, there is no question of my numerous conquests — my adventures. I can't recall all that has happened to me — that would take me too long. Besides, I don't remember all those things."

"Say, rather, that you don't want to remember."

"Please leave all that and come back to yourself. After what you have said to me, and if I have rightly understood you, you decline to yield to any man."

"Unless he provides for me in such a manner that I never need fear poverty, and can at least provide for and bring up a child if one should come to me. Yes, monsieur, that is my firmly settled and very decided resolution, and I assure you I shall never change it."

Her handsome neighbor made an ugly grimace, and continued to walk about the room.

"Devil take it, mademoiselle," he grumbled, "you know how to calculate! you take enough precautions."

"Am I not entitled to that privilege?"

"Yes, but it is rare to find a woman like that —fortunately. With you, love, sentiment, the pride of having a lover — all that ordinarily attracts young girls, passes over your heart and leaves it untroubled. Assuredly, sensibility is not your strong point."

"Not my weak one, you mean. And you, monsieur, are, I suppose, extremely sensitive?"

"I am sensitive, I can assure you, to your charms. But my love has not touched you — you are cruelly cold to me."

"I am not so stupid as the others — that's all."

"In fact, mademoiselle, if to obtain favor in your sight it is necessary to endow you with a fortune, you can very well understand that not every one can indulge himself to that extent."

"A fortune? Oh, no, monsieur, I am not so ambitious as all that. I do not ask a fortune;

but simply what would bring up and educate the child who might be the result of such a union."

"Oh, you only want something for the result? but if there should be no result?"

"Well, then, it would be for the young girl, who would at least be provided against want."

"Oh, it will be for the young girl — if it's not for the child. You think of everything. You are capable of acting as a bank cashier."

"I shouldn't be sorry to have such a job. Men generally earn more with their pens than women can earn with their needles."

"They don't satisfy their love for dress with their needles, it is true."

"No, it is necessity that obliges them to use their needles."

"They are not obliged to be coquettish or fond of dress."

"You, for one, would be sorry if they were not."

M. de Mardeille kept on walking about the room, humming between his teeth,—

"When one knows how to love and please
Needs one any other fortune.

No, no, that isn't at all applicable to this case.

His victim Cupid never spies;
He wears a bandage o'er his eyes.

That is a good deal truer.

Come, lovely dame, I wait for thee,
I wait, I wait for thee."

Georgette continued to work as if the gentle-

man were not there. When he was tired of singing, the neighbor went up to the pretty shirt-maker and said to her suddenly,—

"How much does it cost for a baby's pap?"

Georgette smiled and answered,—

"Seek, and ye shall find."

"Good! now she's quoting the gospel to me. But there is something I have been looking for all my life, and which I have never found. I shan't tell you what it is, out of respect for your sex; but all men will divine what I mean. In fact, to come back to the subject of your demands: It seems to me that with two or three thousand francs[1] one might buy a lot of pap, and for a long time, too."

"Do you suppose a child lives on pap alone?"

"That or anything else; it costs so little to feed a child."

"But feeding him is not the only thing; he has to be clothed. As he grows up his education must be looked after, and then he must be apprenticed in order that he may learn a trade; he must know how to earn a living so that later he may be able to help his parents."

"Oh, tra la la! At that rate you'll never be done. You might as well ask me to buy a man right out, if it is a boy; and to provide a dot if it is a girl."

"Why, that would but be right."

[1] Four or six hundred dollars.

"Did I not tell you, mademoiselle, that you wanted a fortune right in your hand?"

"No, monsieur, you exaggerate! For it seems to me — yes, let's admit that it is a boy you have to bring up — well, then, I think it might be done with twelve thousand francs."

"Twelve thousand francs," and M. de Mardeille gave a leap which almost brought his head against the rather low ceiling. Then he resumed,—

"Twelve thousand francs! and do you think that is nothing, mademoiselle?"

"I think it is only just what would be necessary to bring up a child to manhood. But by putting the entire sum in the savings bank one would get a little interest and so increase it in the end. You may well believe that the mother would keep none of it for herself; but at least she would be sure of her child's future."

"And as this mother would use none of this income for herself, it would still be necessary to support her."

"Oh, no, monsieur; that sum once given would be all; she would wish to receive nothing further."

The fine gentlemen again walked up and down the room, muttering these sentences from time to time,—

"How strange is the world becoming, it is a school where one learns new things every day. Why, women are becoming craftier every day; we men are nothing but children beside them. Twelve

thousand francs! Why with that, not so very long ago, a hundred women would have been content. I don't speak for myself, for, thank God, I have never ruined myself for women. I've got along without loosening my purse strings, which I very much prefer, for I am at least sure of being loved for myself. They don't offer to break off the bargain in that case."

"Monsieur, do you know that your reflections are not polite?" said Georgette, whose patience was taxed by this gentleman's soliloquies.

"Why, mademoiselle, it seems to me that it is at least permissible for me to grumble."

"No, monsieur, that is not permissible. You blame my conduct, but if I wished, monsieur, I should have but a word to say to make you blush for yours — to force you to hang your head before me and to ask my pardon for all the impertinences you have offered me."

M. de Mardeille stared in amazement and muttered,—

"Mademoiselle, I don't understand a word you are saying; if you will explain yourself more clearly— "

"It does not suit me to explain further at this moment — but be easy, you will lose nothing by waiting."

The neighbor took his hat.

"I shall lose nothing? that's a question," he muttered to himself. "I'm afraid I'm let in for

the brooch. If I dared, I would ask her to give it back — but I dare not, inasmuch as I have an idea that she would not return it if I asked her. This little girl is imposing on me. She has such a decided way of speaking; oh, what an idiot I have been! This will teach me to make sacrifices for the women."

And turning towards Georgette, the gentleman bowed slightly to her and departed less beaming than in the morning, and muttering, —

"Twelve thousand francs! a little shirtmaker. What are we coming to? Good God! what are we coming to?"

During the whole of the ensuing week the gentleman of the first floor was in an abominable temper. He went in and out of the house incessantly, scolded his servants, ate scarcely anything, slept badly, and did not once look out of the windows facing the court.

One day Frontin was about to make some remark concerning the young girl in the entresol, when his master suddenly interrupted him by saying, —

"If you utter a single word to me in regard to that shirtmaker — one single word, remember — you'll go flying out of my door, accelerated by the toe of my boot."

But when the week had almost passed M. de Mardeille, who feared that he could never regain his appetite or his desire for sleep, and who saw with

alarm that his fresh and beaming countenance had become as yellow and wrinkled as a roast apple, that his forehead was lined, that his cheeks had fallen in, and that if this went on he would soon look as old as he really was, said to himself,—

"It cannot go on like this! I try to distract myself, and I cannot. I court other women, who welcome my attentions; but I do not go back to them the second time. This Georgette's little phiz is eternally before my sight. I see her in my mind's eye, coming and going about her room, attired in her dressing-jacket and that little skirt. Her charming figure has turned my head and I can't get her out of my thoughts. And, after all, I should be very foolish to allow myself to go into a consumption, when if I choose I may become the happy lover of this young girl. I know it's going to cost me something; but, after all, what is twelve thousand francs? that won't ruin me, inasmuch as she says positively that she will ask nothing further from me. And there are some women who are incessantly asking. One doesn't give them much at a time, but it mounts up, it comes to the same thing and more, in the end."

And M. de Mardeille turned towards Frontin,—

"Frontin," said he, "you haven't met our little neighbor for a long time, have you?"

Frontin, remembering that his master had forbidden him to speak of Georgette, looked at him in astonishment before he answered,—

"Madame Picotee? Yes, I met her only this morning in the court?"

"Why, who's speaking of Madame Picotee, idiot? Did I not say our little neighbor? I should not apply such a term to that matron. I was speaking of the charming Georgette."

On hearing him mention the pretty shirtmaker's name, Frontin said to himself,—

"That's a shame; he's forbidden me to speak of her and he's putting me to the proof."

Then placing his finger on his mouth, Frontin turned towards his master and shook his head as much as to say,—

"Ah, I ain't so stupid as to answer that."

M. de Mardeille impatiently shook his valet's arm and shouted,—

"Are you going to answer me, you rascal?"

"Monsieur, you forbade me to speak of the young lady in the entresol."

"I countermand that order, simpleton."

"Well, I couldn't divine that."

"I wish now that you should speak of her, that you should tell me all you know about her; and you must know something, for you are always at the porter's."

"Hang it, monsieur, it's still the same story; M. Bistelle sends billets-doux and bouquets to Mademoiselle Georgette and begs her to receive him; but nixie, she won't let him in, and she sends back his billets-doux."

"Really, Georgette won't see this gentleman? That's very good indeed, that is. She receives me, though, and M. Bistelle is rich and must have made her alluring propositions. I am preferred, then; she must have a sneaking regard for me. She only refused me because she'd got this cursed calculation into her head — this fear of results. But I am preferred, I am loved, for it's the same thing. Is that all you know, Frontin?"

"Why, there's that old gentleman, the old bachelor, M. Renardin, who still desires to send something to his little neighbor, so he ordered a fine Savoy cake; I don't know how Mademoiselle Arthémise found it out, but find it out she did; then she placed herself on the watch at the porter's lodge and she stopped the pastry-cook's boy on his way and grabbed the Savoy cake! She scooped some of it out underneath and then put it on her head as a cap, and she looked like a Turk in a turban; she walked all over the house that way and served her master's dinner with it on her head. And he happened to have company to dinner."

"Well done! well done; and this gentleman, does he flatter himself that he can win her affections with his sponge cakes? what an ass!"

M. de Mardeille went to the window and lifted the curtain that he might look out. Georgette was still in her accustomed place, and seemed more charming than ever. His only fear was lest she

was angry with him; however, he could not resist the desire to open his window and seat himself beside it, so that he might watch for a look from his neighbor. It was not long before she glanced over towards him; then he greeted her with a low bow, to which she responded with an altogether amiable smile. He was delighted, beaming; he passed an hour at the window, and several times Georgette smiled at him.

"She is not vexed, she will receive me kindly, I can see that in her eyes," said he. "Yes, I may go to see her without fear. Yes, but then if I don't make the sacrifice, I shall be no nearer than I was before."

The day passed and still M. de Mardeille had not resolved on his course of action. Several times he had been to his secretary, counted some bank notes, looked at them sighing, and put them back in their place. It was war to the knife betwixt love and avarice in this gentleman's heart, which was cruelly shaken by the conflict.

The next day M. de Mardeille was still undetermined, hesitant; he could settle himself to nothing, when suddenly Frontin came running in and said,—

"M. de Mardeille, come and look out of the window, Mamzelle Georgette is in the court and she's going to pump, if you did but know how gracefully she pumps."

"Let's see; let's see her."

And our lover hastened to the window which was exactly opposite the pump. Georgette was there in her little fluttering skirt; the exercise of pumping brought a rosy glow to her cheek and made her more beautiful than ever. Did she suspect this? Probably she did, for she appeared to enjoy that which for many others is very fatiguing.

M. de Mardeille, after contemplating for some moments the animated scene, ran quickly to his safe and took therefrom a pile of bank notes; he did not hesitate this time, but thrust them hurriedly into a pocket-book which he slipped into his pocket; then hastily repairing his toilet he left his house to go to Georgette's, saying to himself, like Cæsar when passing the rubicon: "Alea jacta est."

The young shirtmaker had hardly had time to leave the pump and ascend the stairs to her room, where she sat down again to her work, when M. de Mardeille arrived, impressive in his haste and palpitating with hope. He seated himself near Georgette and opened the conversation by saying,—

"My dear little neighbor, I've come to beg your pardon."

"Beg my pardon! Why, I don't remember that you had offended me."

"But I did so the last time I was here, I said some things to you that I should not have said."

"Then, monsieur, I have forgotten them."

"So much the better, then; but it is very amiable of you to have done so. But, charming Georgette, I could not live away from you; I was very unhappy."

"Were you really?"

"Yes, so true is it that to prove my love for you I am ready to make any sacrifice, something I have never before done for any woman; I would do it only to kiss the hem of your dear little skirt — which always flutters away when I wish to touch it. Here, darling girl, accept this pocket-book, it encloses twelve thousand francs in bank notes, let it put an end to your coldness."

Georgette blushed; her eyes shone with joy and triumph; she took the pocket-book, looked at it without opening it, and murmured as she lowered her eyes,—

"Since you have complied with my wishes, I will yield to yours; but I still ask you for one day's respite. Today I wish to devote to family matters, to my memories of childhood; but tomorrow, oh, tomorrow you will find me cruel no longer."

"I can refuse nothing to her who promises me happiness. Then tomorrow you will not be severe; you will let me touch this roguish little skirt which has put my heart in a desperate condition."

"You shall touch it as much as you like tomorrow, and I shall not oppose you."

"Enough, enough, divine creature. I won't hear a word more, and I leave you until tomorrow; for you are so tantalizing that I dare remain no longer. Then tomorrow we will breakfast together and your windows shall be snugly closed, hey?"

"They shall be; you shall see."

M. de Mardeille departed in the seventh heaven of delight.

"She put me off till tomorrow," he mused, "I have an idea that she wanted to count the contents of the pocket-book to see if it contained the sum I had promised her. Oh, she's a cautious little girl, she doesn't allow herself to be easily caught napping. She will see that I have not deceived her, and this time I am certain she will keep her promise."

An afternoon and an evening stretch to interminable length when one expects upon the next day to see the fruition of his hopes. M. de Mardeille did all that he could to kill time; he went to see his friends, dined at a restaurant, went into several theatres, returned home very late, went to bed, and ended by falling asleep and dreaming of Georgette.

The much-desired day dawned at last, but our gentleman slept rather late; he rang for Frontin, who came on tiptoes.

"What time is it, Frontin?"

"Nearly ten o'clock, monsieur?"

"What! have I slept so late as that? Why didn't you wake me?"

"Wake you, monsieur? You didn't give me orders to do so and I should never have dared!"

"No matter! get everything ready for my toilet. I want you to curl my hair carefully; I wish to look as well as possible this morning."

"You always look well, monsieur."

"Not so bad, for a simpleton."

"I meant to say that anyone who is rich can always look well."

"You're talking like a fool now. Oh — Frontin, go and look through the dining-room window and see if my little neighbor Georgette is at her window."

Frontin went and came back to say,—

"Monsieur, it's very extraordinary, but all Mademoiselle Georgette's windows are closed, and she usually keeps them all open."

"Closed!" exclaimed M. de Mardeille, "Ah! yes, I remember, that's what I asked her to do yesterday. That proves that she is expecting me. It's very awkward to have slept so late. Come, Frontin, be quick with my hair!"

The servant hastened to curl his master's hair. When he had done, the latter said to him,—

"Now, go to the sideboard and take some madeira, some bordeaux, some champagne; carry it over to the little neighbor's, and tell her I sent you! In five minutes I will be with her."

Frontin disappeared; but he returned before his master had finished dressing; he held a bottle in each hand and the third under his arm; and he looked even stupider than usual.

"What, idiot! you haven't yet done what I told you? You haven't taken that to Georgette's?" exclaimed M. de Mardeille.

"Pardon me, monsieur, I went, but there was nobody there. That's why I came back with my bottles."

"Nobody there! why she's gone out, of course, to buy something. Couldn't you wait a moment on her landing?"

"Why, that's just what I was going to do at first; but it is well I thought better of it, for it seems I should have waited uselessly."

"How uselessly? What do you mean? Come, explain yourself."

"Monsieur, on my way back I met the porter, and I said to him, 'So Mamzelle Georgette's already gone out; do you know if she'll be long before she comes back?' Then he began to laugh, and answered: 'Hang it, if you wait for her, you'll wait a long time; she's been gone since yesterday evening.'"

"Gone since yesterday evening? Come now, Frontin, you don't know what you are talking about; you must have misunderstood. Gone! and where has she gone to?"

"That's just what I asked, monsieur. It seems

the damsel has moved, bag and baggage. She paid the porter yesterday evening; called in a second-hand furniture dealer and sold all her furniture; then she got into a cab and went off without saying where she was going."

M. de Mardeille turned green, red and gray, he dropped into a chair, murmuring,—

"A glass of water, Frontin; a glass of water! I believe I am going to be ill."

The servant hurried off for the water and brought it to his master, remarking,—

"Were you so very much smitten with the little neighbor, monsieur?"

Then M. de Mardeille threw the glass of water in Frontin's face, shouting,—

"Hold your tongue, you ruffian. I have been robbed! that is what is the matter with me. Go and find the porter, I must speak to him."

"Just so, monsieur; he has something to give you from Mademoiselle Georgette, for he said to me: 'Is your master awake? I have a package to give into his own hands from that young girl, who gave me strict orders about it before she left.'"

"And you didn't tell me that, idiot? Go, run! tell him to come up immediately."

"Wait, monsieur; somebody's ringing — that must be him. I'll go and open the door."

The fine gentleman was still wavering between hope and fear; he said to himself, as he awaited the porter,—

"This packet must be my bank notes, she's sent them back. She's reflected and she's thought better of her bargain. If that is so, I shall have to make the best of it."

The porter came into the tenant's room holding a package of sizeable proportions carefully wrapped in paper and which he carried under his arm as if he was bearing the keys of a city. He showed it to M. de Mardeille, who eyed it suspiciously, as he said to himself,—

"I never gave her enough bank notes to make a package of such dimensions as that."

"Monsieur, that is what the young lady in the entresol charged me to give you when she left."

"When she left! But why did you let her leave? Had you given her notice?"

"No, monsieur; why, her rent was all paid up, she paid a term in advance, and I could not prevent her going; what is more, she seemed in a good deal of a hurry."

"And you didn't ask her where she was going?"

"Pardon me; she told me she was going down to the country, to her home, and that she would be back in Paris within a week."

"And she didn't leave her address with you?"

"No, monsieur; but she left this scrap of a letter for you."

"Well, give it to me, then; that's what you should have done at first. Leave me now; Frontin, you may go also."

The porter and the valet departed, saying to each other,—

"It's a pity he didn't open the package."

"Yes, I am very curious to know what the little shirtmaker can have sent him."

"Couldn't you feel what there was in the paper?"

"Jingo! no!"

"Was it hard?"

"No, it was soft."

"Then it was probably a cream-cheese that the little shirtmaker had received from her home."

De Mardeille opened the package; it contained the little black skirt that Georgette had worn.

"Her skirt!—she has sent me her skirt!" cried M. de Mardeille. "What bitter derision!"

Then he opened the letter and read,—

I told you that to-day you might touch and handle my little black skirt as much as you pleased. You see how I keep my word; I send it to you. You will think very ill of me, will you not, monsieur? But before condemning me wait until you have seen me again, which will be as soon as I can possibly bring it about. Yes, rest assured you shall have news of me.

M. de Mardeille was astounded; the letter dropped from his hands.

CHAPTER X

A Blasé Young Man. The Viscount's Friends. The Third Skirt

Time passed with its usual velocity; a fortnight had elapsed since the events recorded in our last chapter, and we must now enter a new scene and a more aristocratic neighborhood where we shall make the acquaintance of some entirely new personages.

In a very handsome house in the Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin a blasé young man, wrapped in a luxurious dressing-gown, was strolling listlessly from one room to another of his magnificent apartments as he smoked a cigarette. This young man was the Viscount Sommerston.

Descended from a very rich family of the Irish nobility and born in France, he had never been desirous of quitting the land of his birth to dwell in that of his ancestors; at the age of one and twenty he had come into possession of an income of eighty thousand francs, and had immediately given himself with all the ardor of a misguided youth to that disorderly life of pleasure and debauchery which ages a man prematurely, both mentally and physically.

Tall, well-built, handsome, rich, a bachelor, he possessed twice as much as was necessary to kill in a period of ten years any man who did not know how to resist his passions. The viscount was twenty-nine years of age; he was not yet dead, but he was barely more than alive; he had not only used the good things of life, but he had abused them all. The list of his conquests was immense, and among them were many whom he had known only for a week, this gentleman being inconstant and capricious in the extreme; the woman whom he adored to-day he would look upon with the coldest indifference tomorrow. Unfortunately for him, he had met few virtuous women, who would have known how to show him his place; his renown as a roué and as a heedless, reckless fellow was, on the contrary, a recommendation to the women among whom he was thrown and to whom he paid his court.

At the time of which we are writing, Edward Sommerston had dissipated part of his fortune; but enough still remained to him to suffice him for happiness had he but known how to make a good use of it; he did not know how to employ himself nor even how to amuse himself, everything wearied him to the point of extinction.

He had exhausted his power of loving and of all pleasurable emotions, and had ruined his digestion with an over-abundance of champagne and malvoisie; he still played at cards, intermittently

and indifferently except when fate was unfavorable to him,— and when he lost heavily he experienced almost the only emotion that could bring back the flush of life to his listless and emaciated countenance.

One thing alone retained its former zest with this gentleman, and that was smoking. You never met him without a cigarette in his mouth, for he smoked them incessantly, one after the other, indoors as well as out; he was never contented except when indulging in this pernicious habit. He could not, so he said, get along without it. He partly owed this bad habit to the foolish indulgence of those ladies who allowed him to smoke in their rooms, and who sometimes even smoked with him. What do you think of those of the fair sex who smoke?

In vain did the doctors say to the viscount,—

"You are wrong to smoke to such an excess, it will make you ill; you cough, you have weak lungs, and you will end by drying them up; you will go into a consumption."

But this advice had a contrary effect on the young man, who pretended to know more than the doctors, and who had said,—

"They forbid me to smoke, do they? well, I shall smoke all the more, to show them how little I value their opinion."

In fact, the number of cigarettes smoked by Edward Sommerston became so great that it ended

in his valet having no other occupation than making them for his master.

From time to time Edward had travelled, hoping to find new sensations in new climates and scenes; he had visited the Alps, Spain, Italy, England; but unfortunately for him, in any country he who can scatter gold on his way finds no obstacle to his desires; women are vain, men are selfish, innkeepers are grasping, and servants are flatterers everywhere. In Spain, thanks to the jealousy of that people, the viscount had had not a few duels; but as he was well skilled both with the sword and the pistol, he had always been the victor, a fact which had, however, never afforded him the slightest satisfaction.

Once only, while travelling in Switzerland, had an incident occurred which had yielded him the deepest gratification; in trying to climb a dangerous glacier he had fallen into a crevasse, where he had remained for nearly six hours, and had been extracted therefrom by the help of guides and ropes. Edward had been drawn forth half frozen, but highly delighted, and he had retained the remembrance of this accident as one of the most agreeable events of his travels.

Now the viscount, who had only been back from Italy about three weeks, was sauntering about his rooms smoking a cigarette which he had nearly finished, while at a respectful distance his valet Lépinette was engaged in preparing others for him.

Suddenly the viscount stopped short in the middle of the drawing-room and exclaimed,—

"Lépinette! what time is it?"

"Almost three o'clock, my lord," answered Lepinette.

"Is it, indeed? Give me another cigarette, will you?"

"Here it is, my lord."

"I must go and finish dressing. What the devil am I going to do to-day? do you happen to know, Lépinette?"

"It seems to me that I recollect hearing your lordship say that three of your lordship's friends, MM. Florville, Dumarsey, and Lamberlong, were going to call for you to accompany them on horseback to the Bois de Boulogne," answered the accommodating Lépinette.

"Why, yes, you are right; these gentlemen are coming to call for me. (This cigarette doesn't draw, give me another.)"

"Here it is, my lord."

"I don't much care about riding in the Bois—it's always the same thing, it's very monotonous. Lépinette, my good fellow, can you by any possibility suggest something that will prove more entertaining to me?"

"I should be glad to do so, my lord, but your lordship is so very difficult to please; what others would like, you dislike, or at least it affords you no pleasure."

"That's true, I am rather hard to suit in the way of amusement; in that I resemble Louis XIV. But in coming back to Paris I hoped to find something new. This one also draws badly — give me another."

"Here it is, my lord."

"But no — there is nothing new — nothing striking."

"There are a good many pretty women in the neighborhood, my lord."

"Ah, yes — to your taste; not to mine. But don't I hear horses' hoofs in the court?"

"Yes, it's your lordship's friends."

"Confound it! and I'm not dressed. Well, the worse for them; they'll have to wait. Give me another cigarette."

The viscount's friends came into the drawing-room in riding costumes, with their crops in their hands.

The first was a tall young man over six feet in height, but who was so thin, so slim that he looked as if he might snap in the middle should he bend over; and what added to this appearance was the fact that he was always dressed in the latest fashion, and therefore squeezed and compressed himself into his faultlessly-cut garments, so there was not the slightest fold or crease anywhere about him; a good many ladies envied this gentleman his waist. His name was Florville, and his face was sufficiently pleasing.

The second was a young man of middle height, whose frankly red hair and eyebrows and eyelashes did not prevent his believing himself a decidedly handsome fellow, and who dared not turn his head for fear of rumpling his collar or disarranging the knot in his tie; he was one of the habitual frequenters of the Théâtre-Italien, where he never missed a first representation, for he wished to pose as a great connoisseur in music, and was certain that he would have been able to produce the lower chest "do" had his voice been cultivated; but then, it had not been cultivated. This personage, whose manners were as ridiculous as his pretensions, was M. Lamberlong.

The third visitor at the viscount's was a young man of thirty years or thereabouts, neither handsome or ugly, rather stout than thin, with a laughing face, a good-humored expression, and the appearance of a man who went the pace; the name of this latter individual was Dumarsey.

Florville and Dumarsey had monstrous cigars in their mouths; the young man with the flaming hair did not smoke, but he had a glass stuck into his right eye and was never seen without this monocle; his good friends asserted that he should have worn one on his left eye, too, to hide his hideous eyelashes entirely.

"Here we are, Edward! Why, he's not ready!"

"I was sure he wouldn't be, I'd have been willing to bet on it."

"Why, what is your hurry, my dear fellows? In the first place it's a deuced deal too early to go to the Bois, we've plenty of time. I'll go and finish dressing. Lépinette, give me a cigarette."

"Here it is, my lord."

"You will allow me to finish dressing in your presence?"

"Go on! go on! take your time," said Dumarsey. "I have an excellent londres, and that is all I care for just now."

"And I'm not overjoyed at the flavor of this imitation havana," remarked Florville.

"M. Lamberlong, if you would like a cigar the box is on that stand. I smoke nothing but cigarettes myself, but I always have cigars at the service of my friends."

"Infinitely obliged, my dear viscount; but I don't hold with smoking. Yesterday at the Opera-Bouffes there was a gentleman who smelled of tobacco and it was annoying to a good many ladies."

"But as you're not going to the Bouffes this evening, you need not—"

"Oh, but I'm going to a concert this evening to hear Albani sing."

"Really, you think of nothing but music."

"Yes, it is my element!"

"You must know, Edward," said Dumarsey laughing, "that Lamberlong would have produced the chest 'do' if only his talent had been culti-

vated. It was a great pity to have neglected his 'do.'"

"Isn't there still some way of catching that note by taking to the railway — an express train, for instance."

"Gentlemen, you are laughing — but it is nevertheless true that lately at the Bouffes a gentleman said to me, 'Your place is here!'"

"In the balcony?"

"No, no; at the Bouffes, with sixty thousand francs salary."

"He must have heard your chest 'do,' must this gentleman."

"Yes, he did, as I was leaving college."

"One must confess it, some mortals are excessively fortunate! Now here is a gentleman who has heard Lamberlong's chest 'do.' And here are we who pay a fabulous price, we may rent the whole of the Opera-Bouffes, and we can't hear it! It's mortifying in the extreme."

The young man with the red hair rose impatiently and went to look at the pictures which adorned the drawing-room.

"What's the latest news in society, fellows?" said Edward as he retied his cravat.

"By Jove, nothing of any interest — nothing spicy. We haven't had a good scandal, the principals of which are known to everyone, for some time past."

"Well, who is the fashionable beauty just now?

Remember, fellows, I've only just got back from Italy, and I know nothing of what is going on in Paris."

"There are five or six who are greatly in vogue, but you've seen them; you were at the party at Saint-Phar's the night before last, weren't you?"

"I saw nothing marvellous there — if that's all you have to offer me!"

"Yesterday, there was a ravishing blonde at the Bouffes, she attracted everybody's attention."

"Well, did you inquire who she was, Lamberlong?"

"Yes, she's the wife of a rich Spaniard who brought her here from Brazil."

"Oh, if he brought her from Brazil, that's quite out of the question — that's altogether too far to follow a flame."

"But you, viscount, must have had some romantic adventures in Italy? The women there are very vindictive they say."

"Not more so than in France. I've seen the glitter of the little stilettos they wear in their belts or their garters, but I've never felt the point of one of them."

"Then you didn't have any desperate love affairs."

"None at all; it's really very dismal — love has taken his flight, my dear fellows."

"A certain young man who frequents the orchestra at the Bouffes doesn't say that; he's dying

of love for an actress, but he won't tell us which one."

"Only those who frequent the Bouffes do such things nowadays. Lépinette, a cigarette!"

"Here it is, my lord."

"How many of those do you smoke in a day, Edward?"

"I don't know, I haven't counted."

"Two dozen, I wager!"

"And I say, three."

"By Jove! you've only to ask my valet; he's better capable of informing you in regard to that than anybody else."

"Lépinette, how many cigarettes per diem does your master smoke — as near as you can tell?"

Lépinette reflected, then he answered,

"Messieurs, I've sometimes given his lordship as many as sixty; but never less than forty."

"Ha, ha, ha! that's magnificent; sixty cigarettes a day! You deserve a prize, Edward; we shall have to make you a crown of cigarettes."

"My dear fellows, one must do something; and when one has no other pleasures — "

"Come, viscount, you'll never make me believe that you are not taken up with some little beauty or other."

"No, my dear Florville; at this present moment there is no one. I am done with love, it's ended for me — my heart is invulnerable to its darts. The incendiary glances of the ladies ignite

no flame, but leave it cold and frozen; and besides, when one knows women, one knows also that one can put no faith in their vows."

"Oh, there are exceptions," said Dumarsey. "Wait a bit, Edward; didn't you once have a connection with a very pretty young girl — I think you picked her up — took her from some haberdasher's shop — she came from Lorraine? She was a simple young country girl, hardly more than a peasant?"

"Oh, yes, I remember, it is Suzanne you mean."

"Suzanne! exactly so; I remember you called her so. She seemed to be very fond of you, did that little girl."

"That's to say, she was altogether too fond of me; it became insupportable, she was so awfully sentimental."

"What have you done with this Suzanne?"

"What have I done with her? Why nothing. What can one do with a girl of whom one has grown tired, but part with her? There's nothing else to be done."

"Then you don't know what has become of her?"

"No, really; and I should be very sorry to know. I had enough trouble to get rid of that little thing, who was very importunate. Lépinette, give me a cigarette."

And the viscount ill-temperedly threw down the

cigarette which he had in his mouth, and from which he had hardly taken three puffs. Since they had spoken to him of this young girl called Suzanne his forehead had been marred by a scowl and his face had taken on an expression of ill-humor. But young Lamberlong brought a smile to everyone's face by exclaiming,—

"By Jove! I can't remember what they are playing at the Bouffes tomorrow! Can any of you fellows tell me?"

"Lamberlong, do give us a little peace with your Bouffes! You must know, fellows, that he doesn't miss a single performance at the Italian opera and he doesn't understand a word of that language."

"Who says that I don't know a word of Italian? It's false; I understand it very well indeed."

"You know it when you hear it, but you don't understand it."

"You understand it, you say; well, then, give me an answer to this. 'Pone nos recede?'"

The young man with the red hair scratched his forehead, looked at the ceiling and muttered,—

"I never heard those words at the Bouffes."

At this the dandy shouted with laughter, and Florville exclaimed,—

"What, didn't you know that Dumarsey was talking Latin to you?"

"Latin! and how did you think I should understand that? Do you suppose I know Latin?

— a dead language. They don't sing in Latin at the Bouffes."

"My lord's horse is saddled," announced a little groom, putting his head in at the door.

"Very good, then we'll start, fellows. Oh, Lépinette, have you filled my cigarette cases?"

"Yes, my lord, I've filled them all, and even put some in your pockets."

"Very good. Come on, let's mount, fellows."

Two days after the riding party, Edward Sommerston was extended on a sofa in his smoking-room with a cigarette in his mouth, as usual, and feeling bored to death as he watched the puffs of smoke rise and then break and spread themselves into a mist so thick that one could hardly see from one end of the room to the other. Suddenly a door was half-opened; Lépinette put in his head, and as he tried to get sight of his master through the clouds of smoke, he said in a low tone,—

"Is your lordship asleep?"

"Eh! no, I'm not asleep. I only wish I were; but smoking never sends me to sleep. What do you want with me?"

"I came to tell your lordship that I've made a discovery."

"A discovery! What, have you found a — a treasure — so much the better for you; keep it."

"But, monsieur, this isn't a treasure in money; this is something quite different and a good deal more to your lordship's taste, I warrant."

The viscount half rose as he said,—

"What is this remarkable discovery then?'

"It's a woman, my lord; or rather, a most charming young girl."

The viscount dropped languidly back on his sofa.

"And you ventured to disturb me for that," he said, with a drawl; "is that what you call a treasure?"

"I should have thought your lordship would be glad to know that there was a young person in the house who is quite worthy of a little attention."

"And this beauty lives here — in the hotel?"

"Yes, my lord; the porter here, who is also the landlord's agent, has some rooms on the upper story which he has furnished nicely, and which he lets on his own account."

"Yes, his perquisites; I understand. Well, go on."

"Well, he's rented one of these rooms to Mademoiselle Georgette, an extremely well-conducted young person, who rarely goes out and never receives anyone in her room."

"Very good. Then your treasure turns out to be virgin gold. Does the porter vouch for that?"

"No, your lordship, he hasn't positively affirmed it; I simply repeat to you what I have heard."

"And what occupation does this straight-laced maiden follow?"

"She makes small articles of tapestry work — embroidery — pretty little flummeries, lamp mats, for instance; small rugs for the feet, cigar cases — admirable cigar cases."

"How come you to know all this? Have you been buying something of this young girl?"

"No, my lord, but the porter showed me one his new tenant had given him for a present; it was very pretty."

"The porter smokes then?"

"Yes, like a chimney, my lord."

"These clowns ape everything we do; well, what has all this to do with me?"

"I thought your lordship would be curious to see the little girl on the top floor?"

"A common little face, I suppose, and flirtatious manners — a grisette who wants to be run after — I know them only too well."

"Oh, no, she hasn't a common face. I don't say she's a beauty, my lord, for that wouldn't be true; but she's very pleasing, on the whole; she has a very slender waist and a charming figure, a well-shaped ankle, and a tiny foot."

"Indeed, you seem to have taken an inventory of this young person's charms, Lépinette?"

"Just now, monsieur, I was on the landing as she was coming upstairs in a dressing-jacket and a short skirt, both of which were as white as snow, and the skirt was embroidered at the bottom. Oh, she looks as if she was prosperous enough, and

she was singing as she went up the stairs. At first I drew back to let her pass, and she bowed very graciously; then, as she was going up the next flight, I said to her, 'Are we to have the honor of having you for a neighbor, mamzelle?'"

"Deuce take it, Lépinette! you did not lose any time in scraping up an acquaintance."

"When one has the distinction of serving your lordship, one ought to know how to conduct one's self with the fair sex."

"Not so bad! go on, Lépinette."

"The young person stopped and answered very amiably, 'Yes, monsieur, I live in the house'; then she bowed again and continued on her way upstairs."

"Is that all?"

"No, my lord. As this meeting had been very pleasant to me, I took care to be on the landing several times after that — and 'twas well I did so, for just now the damsel went lightly down."

"For one who never goes out it seems to me the young lady is very often on the staircase."

"My lord, she'd forgotten to buy some coffee; and it seems she's passionately fond of it — she can't get along without it."

"Did she tell all that?"

"Yes, my lord, just in passing quickly by; she didn't stop. She won't be long before she goes up again, I think, and if your lordship wants me to I'll go and watch over the banister, and as soon

as I see Mademoiselle Georgette down below I'll come and tell you."

"Come now, do you suppose I shall bother myself to go and look at a grisette? Lépinette, you're a fool."

"I only wanted your lordship to see her in her jacket and short skirt, they are so becoming to her."

"Hang it! there's a very simple way of seeing this grisette, without putting myself out in the least; she makes tapestry cigar cases, you tell me. I'll order one from her. Watch for her as she comes back, and when you see her beg her to come in for a moment; you can tell her what for"

"All right, monsieur, I'll go and put myself on the watch to do your commission."

Lépinette departed on his errand and Edward Sommerston resumed his cigarette; but five minutes had barely elapsed when the valet said to his master,—

"My lord, the young person is here."

"What young person?"

"The little girl from the top floor who makes cigar cases."

"Oh, I'd forgotten your damsel. Well, let her come in."

"Here, my lord?"

"Of course, you don't suppose I'm going to disturb myself to go into the drawing-room to receive a grisette, do you?"

"I'll bring her in here, then."

The servant went out, but soon returned to announce, "Mademoiselle Georgette"; and that Georgette whom we already know, since we have seen her in the Rue du Seine and the Boulevard Beaumarchais, came into the smoking-room in her little morning costume; but this time there was something more of refinement and of coquettishness in her simple toilet; her dressing-jacket was trimmed with narrow lace and her white skirt was embroidered at the bottom, while her hair was done up according to the prevailing mode, one could see that she now belonged in the Chausseé-d'Antin.

Georgette took three steps forward then two backward, as she exclaimed,—

"Good heavens! what a dreadful smell!"

Then the viscount turned on his sofa and said languidly,—

"You don't like the smell of tobacco, then, little one?"

"Oh, is there some one there? One can't see for the clouds of smoke. Faugh! I can't stay here. I shouldn't want any one to think that I'd been in a guard house"

And Georgette darted out of the smoking-room, went down a passage, opened the first door she came to, and found herself in a charming drawing-room, where she stopped for a moment.

"Good enough! at least one can see clearly

here and does not risk being poisoned by tobacco."

The young man, astonished by Georgette's sudden flight, got up, laughing, and said,—

"She's very odd, this little girl; though I could not see what she looked like for the smoke. But where the devil has she gone to. Let's see! let's look for her, we'll play at hide-and-seek; it will make me think I'm a boy again."

After looking first in one room and then in another, the young dandy came at last to the one in which Mademoiselle Georgette had taken refuge; he saw her seated in an easy chair and turning over the leaves of an album which was on a stand beside her. This young girl's lack of ceremony, the ease which she displayed in this fine drawing-room surprised Edward, who said, after looking attentively at her for some moments,—

"Those caricatures seem to amuse you!"

Georgette rose and gracefully bowed to the viscount as she answered,—

"I expected that you would come, monsieur, and I did not think I was doing any harm in looking through the album."

"No, you've done no harm, except to escape from my smoking-room as if you had got into a bear's den."

"Goodness, monsieur, I don't know that I shouldn't prefer a bear's den to a room where the smoke prevents one from seeing anything and

makes one's eyes smart and gives one a headache, to say nothing of the insupportable odor one has to breathe."

While Georgette was speaking, Edward examined her from head to foot, but the scrutiny was all to the young girl's advantage; and he muttered to himself from time to time,—

"Very good, by Jove! very fetching indeed, that confounded fellow Lépinette wasn't deceiving me."

Then the viscount walked about the room still scrutinizing Georgette, who was standing in the middle of it, and he smiled as he admired the graceful figure in the little white skirt, until Georgette, rendered impatient by this inspection, cried,—

"Will you not soon have done looking at me, monsieur?"

"Why, you are very good to look at?"

"Is that what you wanted me to come here for?"

"Well, and what if that were the reason. My valet has praised your figure, your carriage, so extravagantly that I wanted to see if what he said was true."

"If I had known that I certainly would not have entered your rooms. Good-day, monsieur."

"Why, just a moment! what a hurry you are in, Mademoiselle Georgette; for I believe that Georgette is your name?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And from what part of the country do you come?"

"From Bordeaux, monsieur."

"From the south, I would have wagered it."

"And why would you have done that?"

"Because you seem to me to have a rather inflammable little head."

"Oh, my head's all right, monsieur."

'Do you live alone up there?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And how many lovers have you, Mademoiselle Georgette?"

The young girl looked at the viscount rather impertinently; then she replied,—

"I haven't any, monsieur."

"What, not one, not a tiny little one?"

"No, monsieur."

"That's very surprising."

"What do you see to surprise you in that, monsieur? Don't you suppose a young girl can live and support herself without a lover?"

"In Paris I should think it would be deuced difficult"

"Not more difficult in Paris than elsewhere; a woman can always do so if she wishes."

"Not always. The desire to please, coquettishness, is innate in all women. They want fine clothes, and they can't earn the wherewithal to buy them; they want to wear silk dresses and Indian shawls You are charming in that little

costume, but you could not go to the Mabille in it."

"I don't hold with going to the Mabille."

"You don't really mean what you say, do you?"

"Yes, I do, monsieur."

"No lover! what a phenomenon, for with that waist, that tiny foot, you ought to have made numberless conquests."

"Why, yes, of course I might."

"And you listened to nobody?"

"To nobody."

"Then you have a faithful swain, no doubt, in your own part of the country, or some secret passion which fills your heart?"

"No, monsieur, I have no secret passion."

"Such being the case, I can only remark again that you are a phenomenon, and I am proud to have so rare a neighbor. But perhaps you are afraid of loving, afraid of love?"

"Me? I am afraid of nothing."

"Ha, ha, ha! how amusing you are."

"So you think me amusing, monsieur? Really, I ought to be flattered."

"I think you are provoking, bewitching, ravishing."

And the young man was about to put his arm round Georgette's waist, but she quietly pushed him away, and said in a very decided tone,—

"Monsieur, these manners don't suit me, and I warn you they are never successful with me."

"Forgive me, mademoiselle; I forgot that I had to do with a Lucretia."

"Is that all you have to say to me, monsieur?"

"Well, not quite; you see, I wanted to order a few cigarette cases, my servant has told me that you make charming ones."

"I do the best I can — do you want one?"

"If you will kindly make it for me."

"What color do you want?"

"Oh, I leave that entirely to you."

"All right, monsieur; I charge fifteen francs."

"As you please; the price matters little to me."

"Well, in that case, monsieur, you shall have your cigar-case within three days."

"Very well; will you kindly bring it yourself?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"I shall not ask you into my smoking-room."

"So much the better, for the smell of tobacco gives me a headache. Good-day, monsieur."

Georgette made a most enticing little curtsey and the viscount said, as he watched her depart,—

"By Jove! she must be mine, that little brunette; for she is really very original."

CHAPTER XI

An Attempt. Tertia Solvet

Edward Sommerston placed not the slightest particle of faith in what Georgette had said as to having no lovers; the viscount did not credit for a single moment that a young girl could live alone and work for her living and yet be pure and virtuous.

"This little girl," he said to himself reflectively, "is playing a part, she is not so innocent as she would wish to appear; she thinks by this means to make people more generous to her, to get more out of them. I have seen too much of the world, however, and too much of her class, for that kind of craft to impose upon me. Eventually, of course, she will prove complaisant like all the rest; for she is a woman, and she wouldn't belong to the fair and frail sex if she were not fond of dress and adornment, jewelry, dainties and pleasure, for those are the things that lure them all."

During the three days which were to elapse before she brought the articles he had ordered, the young man several times inquired of his servant if the latter had met the young embroideress who

lived above, on the staircase; but Lépinette had not seen Georgette again, and it seemed to have vexed him. Perhaps the servant hoped to win the young girl more easily than his master.

On the day that Georgette had designated, Edward, arrayed in an elegant morning costume, awaited the young girl in a pretty little drawing-room which sometimes served as a boudoir. He was smoking cigarettes, but they were of a very mild and slightly perfumed tobacco.

About mid-day Lépinette announced, "Mademoiselle Georgette!" and the young workwoman presented herself, still in her morning costume, for which she apologized as she greeted the viscount.

"Forgive me, monsieur, for presenting myself in this negligé, but I could not spare time from my work to change it, and I never dress in my room."

"The little jade knows very well that she looks better thus!" commented Edward to himself; "and that's why she came in that little short skirt. If she hadn't been so well-built she'd have come in full sail, with no end of draperies. I understand all about that. Mademoiselle wishes me to admire her perfections; and from that I deduce the idea that she wishes to please me."

Then the young man, without troubling himself about rising from his easy chair, pointed Georgette to a chair.

"Pray be seated," said he, "you are very well

as you are; besides, one does not dress to run into a neighbor's. Will it be displeasing to you if I continue to smoke?"

"Why, monsieur, it is not for me to place any restraint upon you."

"As for that, this tobacco is very mild and the odor is not obnoxious even to those who don't like tobacco."

"That is true, it smells like patchouli."

"Did you have the goodness to think of my cigar case?"

"Here it is, monsieur," and Georgette handed the viscount a pretty cigar case lined with silk.

"That's very nice, that's really very nice."

"I am glad it pleases you."

"I should be hard to please if that didn't suit me; the colors in these little squares are so perfectly blended. You have a good deal of taste as well as skill. And it only took you three days to make that?"

"That's long enough."

"It must be worth fifty francs at least."

"No, that would be too high a price to pay for it. I only want what belongs to me."

"But at that rate you can barely earn five francs a day, for you have to buy your wool and silk."

"If I could earn five francs a day I should be more than satisfied. I should be too rich."

"You're not very ambitious. You don't wish to change your position then?"

"Hum! that's according to circumstances. To change it for a short time only is hardly worth while. But I have my dreams sometimes, monsieur, and then I imagine I am in a fine apartment; I have diamonds, cashmere shawls, a carriage, servants to wait on me, and everything magnificent."

"I understand the apologue," said Edward to himself. "She requires nothing short of her 'dreams'; she has an eye to her own interests, has this little jade."

While reflecting thus the young man arose from his chair, and placing himself in front of Georgette, he threw his body back, put his hand on his hip, and laughed in her face.

"Say now, do you know, you are not half stupid?"

Georgette sustained his look and received his compliment without displaying the least emotion, merely rising and remarking,—

"I am extremely happy to know you have such an opinion of me, monsieur."

"Well, why don't you sit down? You don't mean to say you are going already?"

"Yes, monsieur, for I can't waste my time in doing nothing — I can't afford to do so."

"Stay just a moment, however; let's talk a bit. In the first place you can't go until I have paid you."

"Oh, I am not uneasy about that, I am willing to give you credit."

"And in that you are wrong, perhaps; please grant me a few moments. It gives me much pleasure to talk with you."

Edward took Georgette's hand and induced her to sit down again, then he seated himself close beside her, and began by saying,—

"There is one thing that you don't know."

"And what is that, monsieur?"

"Why, I am in love with you."

"Ha, ha, ha! how foolish!"

"Perhaps it is foolish, but whether it is so or not, it is all the same to me. Yes, I am rather surprised at it myself, for do what I would I have not been able to fall in love for some time. There must be something about you, though I don't know what it is, something more enticing than there is in other women. Wait a bit! I believe, by Jove! that it is your little skirt that has stormed the fortress of my heart."

"If it be that, monsieur, I'll go upstairs to my room, and I shall send you the little skirt as soon as possible, in order that you may be bothered by no further desires."

"What a mischief you are! No, that won't suffice me. I want the little skirt, and its wearer also. What a pretty little hand."

"Monsieur, don't touch me, I beg of you. I have told you already that I don't like such manners."

"That's true, I keep forgetting that you are not

that kind of a girl. I am little accustomed to meeting girls like you."

"Oh, you have such a bad opinion of women; you must have met some that were pure and good, and probably you seduced them and then abandoned them, as other men do."

"That's possible. I don't remember anything about that. With me, those with whom I had to do in the past are always wrong."

"I can well believe that, monsieur; that is why it is always necessary to take precautions for the future."

"How droll she is! Do you know, my dear, you're an immensely comical little thing."

"I forbid you to call me 'my dear,' monsieur; as I see it, nothing justifies you in doing so."

"Because you have not yet consented to make me happy; but before long you will do so — so it all comes to the same thing."

"No, monsieur, I will not be your mistress, if that is what you mean. Once more, I tell you, don't speak to me like that, or I shall go, and I shan't come again."

"Come, now, don't be angry, Mademoiselle Georgette, you shall be treated respectfully. You are willing I should be your lover, aren't you?"

"No, monsieur."

"What! I must have seriously displeased you then."

"No, it isn't that."

"If it isn't that, then it's — "

"No, I don't care to listen to you, because I know you are too flighty — you are never faithful to any woman longer than a month at the very outside; and I don't wish to put myself in the way of being thrown over like that."

"Some one has been telling you fairy tales. I don't promise to love you forever. By Jove, though, if we don't throw the women over, they throw us over. Some one has to begin and I prefer it should be me."

"You have a way of settling things that doesn't help me change my opinion about you. You are too much run after, too highly thought of in society to attach yourself to a grisette."

"There's some truth in what you say there! you reason very logically, my charmer; but what if I were to tell you that there are even now some great ladies who are over head and ears in love with me, and that I only make fun of what they may say or think of me?"

"Why, I shouldn't believe you. Good-by, monsieur; I must go home."

"I can't let you go without an answer."

"Later on — we shall see."

"Then you will come and see me again? Besides, I must have two more cigar cases — I want to give them to my friends. By the way, let me pay you for this one."

And the young man, drawing a purse full of

gold[1] from his pocket threw it on Georgette's knees. The latter looked at the purse for some moments, then she weighed it in her hand and asked,—

"What have we here?"

"That's what I owe you."

She opened the purse, counted its contents, and exclaimed,—

"Nearly five hundred francs! why that would be a good deal to pay for a cigar case."

"Then you must make me two more — that will pay for all."

"Oh, no, monsieur, I cannot accept that; I'll take what is due to me and I'll take nothing more."

So saying, Georgette took fifteen francs in gold from the purse and put the remainder on a stand nearby, then she took her departure.

"Good-by, monsieur le vicomte, I shall come back when your cigar cases are done."

Edward was so much taken by surprise at the young girl's action that he made no effort to keep her. As may be imagined, Georgette's refusal to accept the purse full of gold had not diminished the young man's fancy for that maiden; instead, it strengthened it, as she had known very well it would. Desires which are quickly satisfied seldom last long; one's passions need obstacles to increase

[1] Purses of knitted silk were then in vogue, and one could naturally see the gold or silver shining through the meshes.

them and keep them from dying down. A happiness which runs smoothly along nobody wants; it is like a dish without seasoning.

But owing to this new caprice, which had become so imperious, the viscount was no longer bored, and he smoked fewer cigarettes; which goes to prove that love has its uses, after all. His friends perceived the change.

"My dear fellow, you've some new fancy in your head," said Florville; "I would be willing to bet on it."

"Why, you can see it from the expression of his eyes," said Dumarsey. "It's some new love affair that brightens him up like this."

"You're right, fellows; you've guessed it. I've taken a violent liking — deuce take it, I believe I am in love."

"Really! then she's very pretty."

"She's better than pretty — she's provokingly original and enticing."

"Did you see her at the Bouffes?" demanded the affected Lamberlong.

"At the Bouffes? Oh, I can assure you that she never goes there."

The gentleman with the red hair made a grimace as he murmured,—

"What kind of a woman can she be who never goes to the Bouffes, by Jove!"

"Say now, Edward, what kind of a woman is your new flame?"

"What kind? Why, she's all that's nice and modest; but I adapt Boileau's epigram to women —'All kinds are good except the ones who bore us.'"

"And when are we to see your paragon?"

"Oh, you shall see her as soon as my success is assured, my dear fellows."

"Then the thing hasn't come to a focus?"

"No, and I shall take good care not to make you acquainted with her yet; for I know you, you would try to oust me."

"Surely, among friends, you're not afraid of that."

"And do you think you will have to languish long before the lady's heart yields?" said Florville, "you, viscount, who ordinarily pursue Dan Cupid on a railroad at express speed?"

"Oh, this time I have to do with a mutinous little charmer, who is not eager to say 'yes.'"

"Come, Edward, when will you show us your beauty, which will signify that you have gained your ends. I'll give you three days, surely that's long enough."

"Hum, I don't know as to that."

"Wait a bit, fellows, let's do the thing generously; we'll give him a week. But if in a week he doesn't ask us to dine with his new conquest, we shall declare that he's defaulted. What do you say, Edward?"

"Yes, fellows, in a week. I take the wager."

"If you bring the lady, we pay for the dinner; but if you don't bring her, you'll have the pleasure of feasting us."

"So settled — in a week. Oh, I have every hope of coming out all right."

This meeting had taken place two days after the conversation at the end of which Georgette had refused the purse containing the five hundred francs.

As soon as his friends had gone, the viscount said,—

"I must act now. This young woman has refused gold, but gold has not the same attraction for the eyes as ornaments. She has exhibited her pride in a very determined fashion, but this time I am going to send her some presents that she cannot resist."

The young man got into his carriage and had himself driven to the most fashionable shops; he bought a fine shawl, some silk and velvet materials and a pretty little bonnet which he thought would be becoming to the saucy face of her whom he wished to please. He brought his purchases home with him and said to Lépinette,—

"Take these things to the young girl on the top floor, Mademoiselle Georgette. Give her my compliments and tell her that I should like to have the cigar cases I ordered of her and that I shall expect her in the morning, even if she only has one made."

Lépinette took the rich presents delicately and went to do the commission with which his master had charged him, and the latter left to go to the horse races.

On returning home in the evening the viscount's first care was to ask how his presents had been received. Lépinette assumed a grave air as he answered,—

"I've seen to-day, my lord, something I've never seen before."

"And pray what have you seen? you act like a sybil announcing a portent."

"Well, my lord, I've seen a young girl, a simple workwoman, who lodges in an attic, refuse a cashmere shawl, silks, velvets, and other articles of adornment, that's all."

"What! you really don't mean to say that Georgette —"

"Yes, my lord; Mademoiselle Georgette has refused your presents."

"Impossible!"

"It is so, my lord."

"You must have managed it badly."

"Not at all; besides your lordship knows I'm used to these errands. I spread out the stuffs and the shawl on a table under the very eyes of this astonishing young girl, who first of all let me do it, and looked at them without saying anything, at length she exclaimed, 'What is to be done with all that, monsieur?' 'Mademoiselle,' I answered,

'You can do what you please with it. My master begs you to accept all these things, and sends his compliments to you asking if you will bring him the cigar cases, even if they are not made.' "

"That was extremely bright on your part. Go on."

"Then Mademoiselle Georgette rose and going over to the presents, said, 'These are all very pretty, very elegant, but I don't want them. You will thank the viscount very greatly on my behalf, and you will carry back all these fine things.' 'But, mademoiselle,' I exclaimed, 'I can't take back all those things, my master ordered me to leave them with you.'

"'Because your master thought that I should be very pleased at receiving such beautiful things; but as he is mistaken, you will take back his presents.'

"'Mademoiselle,' added I, in a supplicating voice, 'you may do what you like with these materials and ornaments, but please keep them or else my master will scold me.' 'I am very sorry, but I cannot keep them!' So saying this extremely stubborn young woman put everything into my arms, the shawl, the stuffs, the box containing the bonnet, and pushing me gently outside the door she closed it on me. This is exactly what passed."

"And so you brought back my presents."

"I had to, my lord."

"Not at all, you needn't have done any such

a thing; you are a fool. You should have thrown them all down in the room and come off without them."

"I bet that she would have thrown everything out on the landing."

"Well, it's a great bother; we must see what's to be done about it. By the way, did she tell you that she would come tomorrow morning?"

"Yes, my lord."

"That's good."

Edward could not get over the young girl's conduct; he walked agitatedly about the room. At times he was half tempted to go up himself to Georgette's room; but she might refuse to open the door to him and he did not wish to furnish a spectacle for the whole hotel; so he went to bed.

"She will come tomorrow," he soliloquized, "I shall know why she refused my presents, for I asked nothing in return for them — however, she might have imagined — Oh, Mademoiselle Georgette, you won't always resist me. I believe I really am in love with her. Besides now my honor is involved in this affair; it must not be I who have to pay for my friends' dinner."

All night the viscount was pursued by the image of this young girl who had refused his brilliant presents. He rose early, began to smoke, and threw away several cigarettes he had hardly commenced. He had all the things he had sent to Georgette carried into the little drawing-room; he

looked at the stuffs spread out on the divan and said to himself,—

"Perhaps she did not like these colors, though this shawl is really a beauty. No, that cannot be the reason. Can it be that she really wishes to walk in the path of duty rather than in the path of pleasure; but what of that day dream she was telling me of in which she imagined herself to be very rich? the little girl has some idea in her head and I must find out what it is."

Towards noon Georgette arrived and Lépinette conducted her into the little drawing-room, where the viscount was impatiently awaiting her. She bowed to him and gave him a charming smile; he on the contrary was sulky and showed her a seat, saying coldly,—

"Will you not sit down, mademoiselle?"

"Monsieur, your cigar cases are finished, here they are."

"Very well, but I wasn't bothering about them."

"Your valet told me you wanted them, however."

"My valet is an ass. For the matter of that, you know very well that the cigar cases are only a pretext for seeing you; of what use is it to pretend when one can speak frankly?"

"Why no, monsieur, I did not know it."

Edward showed the objects strewn on the divan and said to Georgette rather brusquely,—

"Why did you refuse those things?"

"Why did you send them to me?" she replied in the same tone.

The young man found no answer to this, he began to laugh and then exclaimed,—

"Decidedly, no one can get the last word with you. Come, my dear, let's have a game of cards on this table. Will you?"

"I don't know how to play cards."

"Oh, you understand very well what I mean by that; but I will explain myself categorically. I adore you."

"You have already told me that."

"In love it is allowable to repeat one's self; in fact, that is the charm of it. We will say, then, that I adore you."

"As for me, I don't believe it."

"I shall compel you to believe me! You don't imagine that you can pass all your youth without learning what love is?"

"I don't, monsieur, but I have always heard tell that it was best to swear to nothing."

"That's very reasonably spoken. Well, let me be this fortunate mortal who is to teach you how to love. I am sure I can make you happy, give you a future that will be worthy of envy."

"Men will always say that to the girls whom they wish to lead astray — but later on — "

"As for me, I keep my promises. In the first place I shall settle you in a pretty apartment which I shall furnish tastefully; you will have dress

and jewels; I shall take you to the theatre and into the promenades; you shall have a carriage at your orders. I will pay your tradespeople, and what is more, you shall have a thousand francs a month to spend. Come, how does that please you?"

"Why, that's very generous, but how long would that last?"

"As long as you loved me."

"You mean to say as long as you loved me, and the love of you gentlemen who are able to satisfy all your fancies never lasts long."

"I shall have but one fancy hereafter, and that will be to please you. Well, Georgette, you have heard what I have to say, and you will consent to make me happy, will you not?"

And the viscount tried to snatch the young girl's hand, but she drew it quickly back, and answered,—

"No, monsieur, no."

"What, you refuse my propositions?"

"I refuse them."

"Then you must have some reason for hating me! do you dislike me so much?"

"Not at all, I assure you."

"Then my offer doesn't satisfy you. Well, tell me what you desire, explain yourself I beg of you."

Georgette was silent a moment, at length she said,—

"If I were to tell you what I wish you would think it very ridiculous, I am sure."

"No, no, speak; women have the best right in the world to be fanciful, but—"

"But this is not fanciful, it is merely foresight for the future. Monsieur, how much do you think it would cost to bring up a little girl from the cradle up to the age of sixteen or thereabouts? in fact, to educate her to womanhood?"

The young man stared in astonishment as he answered,—

"What the devil makes you ask me that? and what connection can that have with my offer to you?"

"A very close one, I assure you; in short, will you not answer me? What would the education of a young girl, her maintenance, everything cost?"

"How should I know. Do you suppose that I busy myself in thinking of such things as those?"

"Oh, no, I know very well that you don't; but what does that matter? tell me as nearly as you can?"

"Well, let's see, three or four thousand francs would be enough, wouldn't it?"

"No, monsieur, you are very far off in your reckoning; according to my estimate it would cost quite twenty thousand francs."

"Twenty thousand francs! come now, that isn't possible; twenty thousand francs for a baby!"

"Yes, monsieur, when that baby is a girl, and

one wants to give her an education, accomplishments, until she is grown up! Really, monsieur, I thought you were more generous; forty thousand francs a year does not suffice you for your pleasures, and you think that twenty thousand francs to educate and bring up a girl from infancy to womanhood is too much! Ah, that's just like the men."

"Eh, what? no, no, you are right, twenty thousand francs is not too much; but for God's sake let us leave this subject, and go back to yourself. You are not always going to be so cruel to me, are you? What do you wish then, in short, for you have not told me?"

"Well, monsieur, if I should consent to do as you wish, as it might easily happen that a little girl might come to me, I wish to have what would bring her up, what would give her an education, and as I have no faith in the promises of one who wishes to make such a connection, I want that before I give myself to him. Do you understand me now?"

The viscount was astounded, he knit his brows and drew his chair away from that of Georgette, and said after a moment,—

"Ah, so that means that you want twenty thousand francs before you come to me."

"Yes, monsieur, that is the idea."

"You are asking a good deal, mademoiselle."

"But I am not asking it for myself," answered

the young workwoman, casting on Edward a disdainful, almost scornful look; "it is for the little girl, the child."

"The little girl, the little girl, why you haven't got one yet. You might wait at least until you had before asking that."

"Oh, no, for then it would be too late, and I should certainly be refused."

"Do you think so?"

"I don't think so, I'm sure of it," and so saying Georgette fixed so expressive a look upon the young man that he could not bear it, and lowered his eyes as he murmured,—

"In fact, it is quite possible."

After some moments' silence, Georgette rose, saying,—

"Good-by, monsieur."

"What, are you going, mademoiselle?"

"I think we have said all that we have to say."

"Pray excuse me, but your ultimatum set me to thinking. You will let me think it over a bit, won't you?"

"Oh, as much as you like. You compelled me to tell you my idea; it is a bit of foolishness, think no more of it."

"And why should I not think more of it? Surely you were not saying that as a joke?"

"No, I was speaking very seriously; but I am quite sure that you will not make a sacrifice for me — of which I am not worthy."

"Why, I don't say that, only one hasn't always such a sum at his disposal."

"There is no hurry about it, monsieur, we are likely to meet often again. Excuse me, but I cannot stay longer now, I must go to work; so good-by again, monsieur."

Georgette escaped from the young man's hand, for he tried to keep her, and exclaimed when she had gone,—

"I suspected rightly; she is a knowing little thing, as full of tricks as the devil. She has as much wit as she has mischief. But twenty thousand francs like that, all at one stroke; oh, no, I shan't be so foolish as that for a grisette, — that would not be common sense. With her fable of a little girl! She reminds me of poor Suzanne who had, I think, a — little girl; but what the devil am I thinking of that now for? Come, let's forget all that, and go to the club."

The viscount went off to his club and then to the house of one of his friends, where they played for high stakes. He sought distraction at a game of baccarat, he lost ten thousand francs at the first go and ended by winning three thousand. He then stopped playing and said to himself,—

"I should, however, have been willing to lose twenty thousand francs, and I should have had to pay them within twenty-four hours. If I wished, it would not be difficult for me to procure that sum. I have only to sell some railway shares; but

no, no, that would be too stupid altogether, I'm sure that I should be sorry for it afterwards."

Two days passed by, during which the viscount did his best to forget Georgette ; but on the third, being still pursued by her image, he rose early, saying to himself,—

" Hang it ! I am very simple to torment myself in this way, when the happiness I am longing for depends on myself. After all, what are a few bank notes more or less ? I could economize in something else. I will go to my banker's and get the matter done with ; besides, it is the day after tomorrow that I'm to dine with these gentlemen, and it shan't be said that I have to pay for the dinner."

Edward went to his broker and made him advance the sum of which he had need on account of the shares which he was to sell ; then he returned home, put the twenty thousand francs into a handsome pocket-book, and having ordered Lépinette to take again all the things that he had before sent to Georgette, he said to him,—

" Go up to that young girl's room and give her, first of all, this pocket-book and all these other things, and ask only when I shall see her. Go, I shall watch you from the staircase, so see that you do nothing stupid this time."

The valet went up the two flights and the viscount impatiently awaited his return. This time Lépinette came down beaming.

"Well!" said Edward.

"The damsel opened the pocket-book. I did not have the curiosity to look what she was counting, but I think they must have been bank notes."

"What then, idiot?"

"Then she seemed delighted, and said to me as pleasantly as possible, 'Kindly tell your master that if he can come up this evening between eleven and twelve o'clock, it will give me great pleasure. I want to thank him personally.'"

"Bravo, at last 'tandem! denique tandem felix!' Oh, I knew very well I should attain my end, and those fellows can't make game of me."

The young man was ridiculously cheerful. He asked for some cigarettes, of which he had not thought since he had had so much to occupy his mind; then he went out to try and kill time.

He returned home at eleven o'clock in the evening, but he waited patiently until midnight, in order that he might not meet any one on the staircase; then he took the candlestick and went lightly up the two flights. He had made Lépinette point out to him the girl's door; it was the last on the right, there was no chance of his mistaking it. On reaching the door he had found the key in the lock.

"She thinks of everything," said Edward to himself, "as she has arranged it one has no need of knocking, and one need not wait on the landing. That's good enough."

He softly turned the key and went into the room, which was completely dark.

"She has gone to bed already," thought the viscount, and he walked toward the end of the room. He held out his light — there was nobody there; the bed was empty and had not been disarranged. Unable to understand what this meant, the young man looked about him; at length, on a table near the mantelpiece he perceived all the presents which he had sent to Georgette, nothing was lacking, not even the bonnet; on a piece of stuff she had spread out the little white skirt and on the skirt was a letter, addressed to Viscount Sommerston.

Our lover snatched the note and hastily read,—

My Dear Viscount: — I am gone, and you need not look for me. I take with me your pocket-book and its contents, I need only that; I leave you all the rest. What is more, I leave you also my little white skirt which seemed to please you so much; but one day I shall ask it of you again, for I expect soon to see you and explain my conduct to you. Perhaps then, in place of thinking me culpable, you will agree that what I did was quite natural.

The viscount remained for some time stunned, looking first at the note and then at the skirt, then he burst into a shout of laughter, as he said,—

"She is comical, this little girl, and the adventure is quite spicy. I shall regale my friends with it as I pay for that dinner the day after tomorrow."

CHAPTER XII

The Gentlemen of the Three Skirts. The Wherefore

Towards the close of the following month of September, upon a delightful autumn day, at precisely two o'clock in the afternoon a gentleman might have been seen walking up and down in the Jardin des Plantes in the pathway in front of the monkey house.

This gentleman was no other than our old acquaintance, M. Dupont, whom we have lost sight of for so long. We left the Brives-la-Gaillard gallant alone in the private room of the place where he had dined tête-à-tête with Mademoiselle Georgette, who had left him very suddenly, because this gentleman had thought that he could easily do as he pleased with a young girl who had always conducted herself modestly and virtuously when in company with him, and who having consented to dine with him at a restaurant had been forced by circumstances, and against her will, into dining alone with him in a private room. He had been mistaken, however, and his good luck had comprised only a little striped skirt which she had left in his hands.

Since then Dupont had returned to Brives-la-Gaillarde; he had carried with him the little skirt, but had been very careful not to show it to his wife, who would have thought it singular that her husband had brought nothing from Paris but a second-hand skirt. However, Dupont had returned home less inclined to sleep than he had been before his journey; which was one thing in favor of the capital. From time to time when he was alone he had taken the grisette's skirt from its hiding-place; he had looked at it lovingly, he had sighed as he recalled the one who had worn it, whom it had become so well. Upon these days Dupont was still less sleepy than of yore and his wife would say to him,—

"My dear, you did well to go and pass some weeks in Paris, you have come back much livelier, it has done you good."

At length, towards the middle of September, Dupont had received a letter which read as follows,—

If you desire, monsieur, to see again Mademoiselle Georgette, whose acquaintance you made during your stay in Paris last spring, be in that city on the twenty-fifth of this month, and have the kindness to go at two o'clock to the Jardin des Plantes, into the path which faces the monkeys' house, where she will meet you. You will be kind enough to bring with you the little striped skirt which Mademoiselle Georgette left in your possession.

Dupont had trembled with joy when he had read this note,—

"She wishes to see me again, does this charming girl," said he to himself. "The skirt is only a pretext; she repents of having treated me so badly and wishes at last to recompense my devotion. Yes, I shall certainly go to the place she appoints."

Hastening to his wife he said to her,—

"My darling, it is necessary that I should again take another journey to Paris; I must see Jolibois, and then I think it is necessary for my health, this morning I really couldn't rouse myself."

"Yes, my dear, yes, go to Paris," answered madame; "that can but do you good, but don't stay there so long as you did last time."

And this is why our old acquaintance, Dupont, is waiting on the twenty-fifth of September in the Jardin des Plantes in the neighborhood which had been indicated to him, and feeling from time to time a pocket of his gray coat, into which he had rolled the little striped skirt that he had been asked to bring with him.

Presently Dupont perceived that he often passed a middle-aged gentleman very elaborately got up; in this person the reader will recognize M. de Mardeille, who some days previously had received the following note.

If M. de Mardeille is willing to take the trouble to go, on the twenty-fifth of this month at two o'clock in the afternoon, to the Jardin des Plantes to the pathway in front of the monkeys' house, he will there find Mademoiselle Georgette, who will explain to him the motives of her conduct towards him. She will be greatly obliged to him if he will bring with him her little black skirt.

M. de Mardeille had carefully kept this appointment with Georgette, for he ardently desired to see her again.

"Perhaps," said he to himself, "she intends to return the twelve thousand francs which I was stupid enough to give her."

Then he had had the little black skirt wrapped up and tied with twine and put it in the pocket of his overcoat, and had hastened to the place which had been indicated to him. After a little time a third personage appeared on the scene and began to walk up and down, the same as these two gentlemen; this latter was the young viscount, Edward Sommerston, who had received a letter exactly similar to that written to M. de Mardeille, except that it was addressed to the viscount and begged him to bring with him the little white skirt. And as our young dandy had no idea of thrusting a petticoat into his pocket, he was accompanied by a tiny groom who carried the garment in question on his arm and held in his hand a provision of cigarettes. These three gentlemen had not been walking up and down long before they had noticed each other.

"One would say these two dandies also had an appointment in this pathway," said Dupont to himself.

"These two old bucks also seem to be waiting here for some one," thought the viscount, as he smoked his cigarette.

And M. de Mardeille made a similar reflection regarding Edward and Dupont.

Presently the first few drops of a rainstorm began to fall and immediately all the people who were walking about the garden and all the admirers of the monkeys disappeared, except the three gentleman with the skirts. The latter continued to walk up and down the same pathway, and as there were but three of them, and the little groom who followed his master, they could not doubt that each of them had an appointment and as they passed each other they could not help smiling, and each of them had on the tip of his tongue these words,—

"Is it not tiresome to have to wait for anyone? If it were not for a pretty woman whom I expect to meet I should have gone long ago."

Dupont had more than once desired to open a conversation with one or another of his fellow-promenaders, but had not dared.

"The time wouldn't seem so long," he said to himself, "if I were chatting with these gentlemen, it would give me patience; but perhaps they are not in the humor to chat."

Suddenly Edward stopped and pulled out his watch, M. de Mardeille did the same, and Dupont immediately hastened towards them, drawing out his watch also. This time he ventured to say,—

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but will you kindly tell me what time it is by you? My watch is

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perhaps fast and I should very much like to know exactly what time it is now. It is twenty-two minutes past two by me."

"Twenty-two minutes past two, that is exactly what it is by me," said M. de Mardeille.

"Well, by Jove! our watches keep better time than the Charles XV clocks," said the viscount as he looked at his watch. "Mine says exactly the same as yours, gentlemen."

"Why do you say that the Charles XV clocks do not go well?" asked Dupont.

"Are you not aware that that monarch after his abdication developed a passion for horology? He amused himself by repairing and remaking clocks, of which he had an immense quantity, and they went so well together that, as a reward for his labors, he sometimes heard twelve strike during an hour."

These gentlemen laughed a good deal at this anecdote of Charles XV's clocks, then Dupont exclaimed,—

"I had an appointment for two o'clock, though, in the garden — in this pathway."

"So had I."

"And I also."

"But women are never prompt."

"No, never."

"When they are young and pretty, especially, they know how to keep people waiting for them."

"Yes, they do it to increase their welcome."

"I have also brought her a skirt."
"And I the same, as you see."

PHOTOGRAVURE FROM ORIGINAL DRAWING BY LOUIS MEYNELL.

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These gentlemen laughed a good deal at the expense of Charles XV's clocks, then Dupont continued—

"I had an appointment for two o'clock, though in the garden — in this pathway."

"So had I."

"And I also."

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"The same."

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"As for me," said Edward, "I will wait five minutes more; but if Mademoiselle Georgette is not here at the half hour I shall take myself off."

"Georgette!" exclaimed M. de Mardeille.

"Georgette," muttered Dupont, "why that's very odd, for I am expecting a Georgette too."

"And I also."

"By Jove! this is getting peculiar! A dark girl, middle height, whose figure is perfection itself, and such a foot, such a leg; in fact she is all that's delightful."

"That is the exact portrait of the person I am expecting."

"And it is precisely that of the Georgette that wrote to me."

"This grows very comical," said the viscount; "I have a letter here."

"I have the one she wrote to me."

"And I also."

"Let's see; why, yes, it's the same writing. By the way, gentlemen, I have one of her skirts which she left in my possession, and which she begged me to bring to her. Tom, come here and show us what you are holding under your arm."

The little groom approached and exhibited the white skirt, immediately M. de Mardeille and Dupont drew from their pockets the skirts which they had thrust into them before leaving home, and showed them, saying,—

"I have also brought her a skirt."

"And I the same, as you see."

Then these gentlemen all three burst out laughing so loudly that the monkeys tried to imitate them. When this access of gayety had quieted a little the viscount said,—

"Don't you think, gentleman, that this young girl is making game of us in asking us all three to meet at the same place."

"I begin to think so," said M. de Mardeille.

"And to send us in front of the monkeys," said Dupont, "she must have chosen this place intentionally."

"Decidedly she's not coming; here, it's half-past two, I'm going."

"Wait a bit, monsieur, here is a lady coming this way."

"But she's on a gentleman's arm."

"Mademoiselle did not write that she was coming alone."

"I can't distinguish her features yet, for she has a bonnet on."

"But that is not at all her figure; the person who is coming towards us has an enormous funnel-shaped skirt."

"That's a crinoline, that's the latest fashion."

"By Jove! it's ugly enough, surely, and the Georgette I'm expecting used to dress herself so becomingly. One could see how she was made."

"But for all that, the nearer she comes the more it looks to me like her."

"Why, yes, in fact, one would swear it was she."

"It is she. It is really Georgette, gentlemen; wait, she is coming towards us. Oh, there is no longer any doubt of it."

In fact it really was Georgette, dressed tastefully and simply, except that she wore one of those fashionable crinolines which made a woman look like a sugar-loaf. She was arm in arm with Colinet, who had lost his former timid and bashful look.

Georgette and her escort drew near the three gentlemen. The young girl bowed graciously to them and said,—

"Forgive me, gentlemen, for having kept you waiting, it was our coachman's fault, for his horses were dreadfully slow; but let me, first of all, present to you my husband, M. Colinet."

Colinet bowed gravely to the three gentlemen, who returned his greeting, muttering to themselves,—

"Was it to present her husband to us that she invited us here? that was hardly worth while."

Georgette resumed,—

"Gentlemen, I asked you to meet me in this garden because I know there are some paths where few people pass and where one can talk as if at home. I can see one on the other side of these flower-beds where we shall be undisturbed. Will you have the kindness to accompany me there?"

The three gentlemen bowed and the party went into a solitary path, where there were some benches. Georgette and her husband seated themselves, the three gentlemen did the same, the little groom keeping himself aloof. Then the young woman, turning to the viscount and De Mardeille, began,—

"I will make you understand in a few words why I acted with you as I did. First of all, gentlemen, I am neither from Normandy nor Bordelaise. I am from Lorraine; Toul is my birthplace, my parents, honest but poor farmers, are named Granery. I am the sister of Aimée and Suzanne."

The viscount and M. de Mardeille started with surprise, and their brows were overshadowed by gloom when they heard these words pronounced, while Dupont said to himself,—

"Why, what has that got to do with me?"

"Yes," resumed Georgette, addressing herself to M. de Mardeille, "I am the sister of that poor Aimée who came to Paris, where she hoped by her talent as an embroideress to earn enough to be useful to her parents. As ill-luck would have it, she fell in your way. Aimée was beautiful, she pleased you; she was simple and inexperienced, she believed all you said to her, believed in your promises and your vows — and — she allowed you to betray her. A child, a son, was the result of this connection. Then you were no longer the same to her, your visits became rarer, and when

she asked you for the wherewithal to feed and to bring up her child you did not come to see her again. Oh, monsieur, one must have a very bad heart to behave thus; to cease to love a person is quite possible, but to repulse a mother who asks of you bread for your child is unworthy, is base."

M. de Mardeille hung his head without answering. Georgette then turned towards the viscount, and said,—

"Need I remind you, monsieur, that your conduct to my sister Suzanne was exactly the same as this gentleman's to Aimée. You seduced a young girl who was innocence itself, as you very well know; then, having made her the mother of a daughter, you abandoned her and, that you might not be troubled by her tears and complaints, you left Paris.

"My sisters came back to the country in despair. They threw themselves at our parents' feet with their children, whom they were nursing. Instead of cursing them, my parents wept with them and tried to console them; for among us parents do not curse their children when they are unfortunate. Is it not more natural to forgive them? But when I saw my sisters every day weeping over their children's cradles I said to myself,—

"'I also will go to Paris, but I shall go to avenge them.' I was twenty years old, I was

strong and I had a resolute mind. My parents tried in vain to oppose my departure, but I started. Unfortunately Aimée did not then know M. de Mardeille's address, and Suzanne was ignorant of the fact that the viscount had returned to Paris; but nothing stopped me. 'I shall find them,' I said to myself. Something told me that I should be successful in my enterprise; I flattered myself that I should make a conquest of you, gentlemen. You know whether I have been successful.

"Now, M. de Mardeille, I want to tell you that the twelve thousand francs that I demanded of you were for your son; they have been placed at interest for him, they will serve to bring him up.

"And you, viscount, of whom I asked twenty thousand francs, because I knew that you were richer than M. de Mardeille and because the education of a girl is more expensive than that of a boy, you must know that this sum will serve to educate and furnish a dowry for Suzanne's child.

"Well, gentlemen, do you think now that my conduct is blamable? The gold which you were willing to sacrifice in order to ruin me, as you had ruined my sisters, has been put to a good use in furnishing the means of bringing up your children properly, and that which you would have employed for a bad action accomplishes a deed which will do you honor. Well, gentlemen, do you blame me now?"

"By Jove! no," cried the viscount, "rather it

was very well done. You have perfectly acquitted yourself of your intention. Receive my compliments, madame, as well as this little skirt which I hasten to restore to you. Here, Tom, give that garment to madame."

M. de Mardeille did not take all this in such good part as the viscount; however, he felt that he must resign himself and at least make a semblance of repenting his fault, and for this reason he said to Georgette,—

"Madame, I have misjudged you; that is true. I treated your sister Aimée rather slightingly; you have repaired a forgetfulness, a wrong. We men are so occupied with business, with pleasure, we are led away, and we are sometimes guilty when we do not intend to be so. Give my compliments to your sister. Here is the little skirt which became you so well."

"But I, madame," cried Dupont, "I never wronged any of your sisters, and why should you mix me up in this matter?"

"You, monsieur," resumed Georgette smiling, "I at first believed to be a frank, loyal man, with whom I need not be afraid to go out if I was alone in Paris. I did not know these gentlemen's addresses, which my sisters sent me later on. I wanted to go to the theatre and into the promenades, hoping that I should there discover or meet those whom I was determined to find."

"I understand! I was to serve as your escort."

"Something of the sort, monsieur. As to your love; oh, that didn't alarm me when I had learned that you had lied to me, that you were a married man. As that fact was very indifferent to me, I could still have forgiven you; but you tried to take liberties with me and to act in a very unconventional manner. Then, monsieur, I hastily left you and my little skirt, which I hope you have brought back to me."

"Yes, madame, here it is," and Dupont, hanging his head with a rather confused expression, drew from his pocket a little packet which he gave to Georgette; the latter took it and handed it to her husband. Then she rose and making a curtsey to the three personages who had been in love with her, she said to them,—

"Now, gentlemen, that I am justified in your eyes, it only remains for me to give you my best wishes for your future welfare," and bowing again Georgette took her husband's arm and went off.

The three would-be lovers watched her as she departed, and the viscount exclaimed,—

"By Jove! what a difference there is between this funnel thing and that little skirt which showed her form so well. Oh, if I had seen her dressed like this, all this would not have happened."

"Certainly not," cried M. de Mardeille, also fixing his gaze on Georgette; "this would never have happened, and I should still have my twelve thousand francs."

"I am entirely of your opinion, gentlemen," said Dupont. "What a difference it makes in her figure, and the change is not at all to her advantage, the idea of making herself look like a kind of sugar loaf, instead of letting us see her graceful contour. Ah, madame, you played us a very bad trick there."

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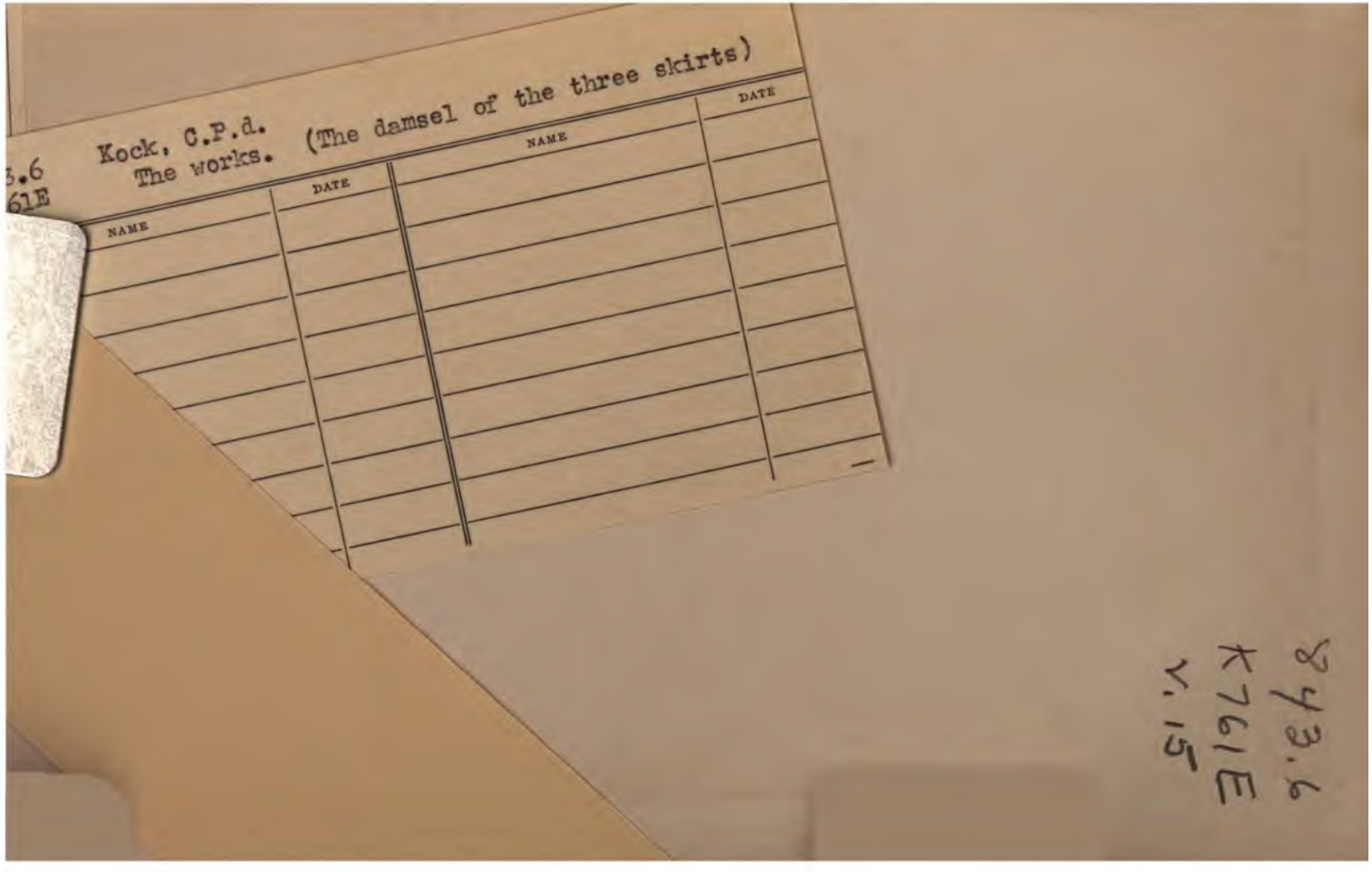

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